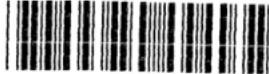




Lucas County







R15DJ

BIRMINGHAM REMEMBERS

NUMBER 1

TRANSCRIPTIONS  
OF  
VIDEO-TAPED INTERVIEWS  
1983-1984

BIRMINGHAM CULTURAL CENTER  
A COOPERATIVE ACTIVITY OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO URBAN AFFAIRS CENTER  
AND  
THE TOLEDO-LUCAS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

MAR 31 1994

DR. JOHN AHERN, PROJECT DIRECTOR



DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF:

MRS. EDNA NOFZINGER

MR. LOUIS SENDI

MR. STEVE "SOS" SOSKO

MRS. NOFZINGER, MR. SENDI AND MR. SOSKO REPRESENTED THE SPIRIT OF BIRMINGHAM. THEIR LEGACY TO THEIR COMMUNITY IS GREAT. ONE SMALL PART OF THAT LEGACY IS THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THIS PROJECT. IF SOMEONE WHO IS NOT OF THIS COMMUNITY SHOULD WONDER WHY BIRMINGHAM HAS BEEN ABLE TO PRESERVE ITS HERITAGE, A VIEWING OF THE NOFZINGER, SENDI AND SOSKO VIDEO TAPES WILL HELP TO PROVIDE AN ANSWER.



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Acknowledgements

Rosemary Johnson-Kurek and Carol Ann DuBrul are responsible for making it possible for you, the reader, to learn more about an important part of our past. Those of us who love Birmingham as well as those of us who love to read history owe a debt of gratitude to these two graduate students. Rosemary and Carol Ann were active participants in determining who would be video-taped. Carol Ann researched the topics and subjects to prepare for the interviews. Rosemary was responsible for all the technical aspects of the production. It was both the commitment and unique abilities of these two individuals that made this project a success.

Dr. Ron Randall and Dr. Harold Allen provided the resources needed to make the videotaping happen. Their support and encouragement is much appreciated.

Mrs. Lucy Gerlach reviewed each of the transcripts a number of times and her editing ability -- knowing when to insert a comma, when to start a new sentence, spotting an incorrect homonym -- certainly made the printed material more meaningful.

A special note of appreciation must be given to the secretarial pool of the College of Education and Allied Professions who had the challenging task of transcribing the tapes and typing the transcripts. Those individuals who are experienced in oral history techniques are aware of the advantages of having the quality of support the secretarial pool of the College of Education and Allied Professions provides.

To all of you, a well deserved "Thank You."

John Ahern  
Project Director



## INTRODUCTION

The Birmingham Cultural Center, a co-operative activity of the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library and the Urban Affairs Center of The University of Toledo, began in August of 1983. Representatives from the two institutions and the community jointly identified project goals and activities. The center was intended to be an example of how agencies with different areas of expertise and limited funds could facilitate the identification, documentation and preservation of a neighborhood's ethnic heritage.

In the first year of the project, three major thrusts were initiated. In the fall a class, "Using Birmingham's Resources in the Classroom," was taught in the community room of the Birmingham Branch Library. It was unique in that those who were auditing the class far outnumbered those who registered for university credit. One result was the generation of much information of use to teachers. This will appear in a subsequent edition of Birmingham Remembers.

In the winter, a monthly lecture series commenced which focused on Birmingham traditions and its historical origins. Those lectures will also be published in a later issue of Birmingham Remembers.

During the academic year 1983-84, under the supervision of the project director, two graduate students conducted a series of oral history interviews using video tape cameras. Technical production was under the supervision of Rosemary Johnson-Kurek, a doctoral candidate in educational media. The specific content of the interviews was the responsibility of Carol Ann DuBrul, a Master's Candidate in Education with a particular interest in adult education. The topics, interview subjects, and the general thrust of the interviews were co-operatively determined.

The video tapes convey an image of a community which is proud of its heritage. They also project a spirit of mutual respect and affection for Birmingham and its residents. There is indeed much to love and admire in this neighborhood established to house the workers of The Malleable Castings Company and The Interlake Iron Corporation.

The decision to interview members of church congregations reflected the staff's awareness of the importance of churches in the community. Churches not only help to define Birmingham, but they also were and continue to be both social centers and a resource for preserving the neighborhood.

Other tapes, such as those on courting and athletics, convey not only aspects of what transpired in an ethnic neighborhood before World War I, but, along with those relating to church activities, they also convey the bonds of friendship that remain firm throughout the years in neighborhoods that are real communities.

A careful reading of the transcripts which follow provides the reader with a sense of the relationships and commitments of the interviewees. Listening to the audio tapes is a better way of understanding what the participants are saying. Yet, to best comprehend all that is being communicated, one really needs to watch the video tapes. For example, Elizabeth Szabo shared:

And, when the time came that we were almost here they notified us that we could see the Statue of Liberty. Everybody went up on deck and some cried, some prayed, and we didn't go down anymore.

Her printed words do not communicate her feelings on learning that she had arrived in America. She and everyone about her knew they were in the new world, their new world. Similarly, inserting the parenthetical remark "(laughter)" at various times in the tape "Athletes in Birmingham" fails to convey the sense of good fellowship, of comradeship, that exists between men who have known one another for half a century, who have played ball together and have experienced passages of life together. Note that when Carol Ann DuBrul, the interviewer,

asks former athletes about ethnic rivalry on the playing field, Emery "Inkie" Kolibar volunteers that individuals from the east side (Birmingham's side of the river) would be threatened when they used the swimming pool in Riverside Park (which is on the other side of the river), Steve "Sos" Sosko responds:

And Emery you got to remember when people from the north end would come over to the east side, they came to see the girls, and actually when they came to see the girls, the boys from the east side would make sure they would never make a date. They'd chase them back across the bridge.

Emery responds:

"You're talking about a different kind of sport." (laughter) The reader may infer much from reading that passage; yet the one who views it on a television monitor will learn much more.

That watching an interview provides a researcher with more data is, from the perspective of this project, a given. That is not to say that there are not some problems related to oral history that are unique to video taping. We learned about the limitations and strengths of this method of collecting data from direct experience; we were experimenting in using video taping for oral history. The observations of the following problems related to video taping oral history reflect the position of this writer, the project director, and not necessarily others involved in the project.

Video taping is expensive. Not only does one need more equipment than a cassette recorder, you also need a trained individual or individuals to operate the camera (or cameras). This is not a simple matter. It is also more expensive in terms of time. The equipment must be set up, appropriate recepticals found, equipment checked for proper operation, lighting evaluated and equipment adjusted accordingly.

Video taping may adversely affect free expression. We began by interviewing Mrs. Nofzinger, who was 95 years old. What is the impact of speaking before television cameras on someone born before the turn of the century? Does the presence of the equipment communicate to her that scholars consider her memories to be so important that all the paraphernalia is necessary? Or do the equipment and the bright lights intimidate? Do they inhibit? A viewing of our transcripts might suggest that our subjects spoke with much candor. On the other hand, there is not a comparison to contrast subject performance, so the question is not answered.

In addition to the possible inhibiting presence of electronic apparatus, the user of video tapes to collect oral history must decide whether to tape on location or in a studio. It would seem obvious, and researchers experienced in cassette recording have noted, that one is more spontaneous when one is in a familiar surrounding -- when one is on one's own "turf." In fact, we did tape in churches, dining rooms, and a bar. When you sit around a table in your neighborhood tavern drinking beer, you are more relaxed, more natural. On the other hand, television programs are made in studios because it facilitates good technical production. Sounds and lights are easily controlled in studios. The larger equipment is more sophisticated. Sound and appearance are better on the last two tapes, which were made in The University of Toledo television studio. Is there a difference in spontaneity between the representatives of St. Stephen's Church talking in a TV studio and the women sitting around a table in Barbara Torek's home? If there is, is the trade-off between spontaneity versus clarity of production worth it?

Viewing our tapes may help future researchers find the answers to the questions we raised. We did observe that structuring an interview with a group of three individuals, at least one of whom was empathetic or familiar with the project's goals, was helpful. In a stress situation, people are more comfortable in a group, among friends. Members jog one another's memories. They provide additional data about an incident. They attribute expertise to one another. They reinforce one another.

It would initially appear that an advantage of using video tape cameras would be that one can use multiple-subject interviews. We thought that at the start of the project. However, to prepare the transcripts, we audio taped all the video material and gave it to The University of Toledo College of Education's secretarial pool. We assumed that the transcripts would be returned typed, but without an indication of who was speaking. Upon receiving the typed material, we planned to watch the video tapes and insert the name of the appropriate speaker. To our surprise and delight, our typists had indicated the name of each speaker by recognizing the person's tonal quality. The typists who did this had experience transcribing the tapes one normally sends to a pool, but they had had no prior experience with multiple subjects. Therefore, if one sees an advantage to using multiple-subject interviews, our experience shows that it is not necessary to use video tape equipment to identify the speakers.

The aforementioned information about the technical aspects of the project needs to be noted, but that is not the purpose of publishing this material.

Birmingham Remembers is a tribute to the Hungarians, Czechoslovakians, Blacks and Italians who came to this plot of land by the east bank of the Maumee River in Toledo, Ohio, and created a new homeland. The speakers in the transcripts which follow are defining community. The recollections of the speakers are the building blocks upon which a community stands. And when those memories are lost, when people no longer care to remember, there is no longer a community.

Birmingham remembers.

Dr. John Ahern, Project Director

### Availability of Audio and Video Tapes

All material generated in this project has been deposited in the main library of the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library. Four types of media have been generated: the original 3/4" video tapes, 1/2" VHS video tapes, audio cassettes, and the transcripts of the interviews.

The 3/4" video tapes and the 1/2" VHS video tapes are located in the Visual Services Department of the main library located at 325 N. Michigan in Toledo, Ohio. Facilities are available for previewing the material in the department. The video tapes are available for circulation; however, they are not available through inter-library loan.

The audio cassettes and transcripts are housed in the Local History Room of the main library. The transcripts of the interviews with Elizabeth Szabo and Edna Nofzinger presented here were edited to create a topical, narrative format. No information was deleted from the interview; however, a number of original questions were eliminated. The original transcripts may be of interest to scholars.

For information about use of material located in the Local History Room, contact:

James Marshall, Head  
Local History Department  
Toledo-Lucas County Public Library  
325 N. Michigan  
Toledo, OH 43624  
Telephone: (419) 255-7055

EDNA NOFZINGER

This material is taken from an interview done by Carol Ann DuBrul on December 19, 1983. The narrative was prepared by Mary L. Sarabia in November of 1984. Certain questions asked by Mrs. DuBrul are included to maintain the flow of the narrative. Mrs. Nofzinger was 95 at the time of the interview. She was born in 1888 in what is now called Birmingham.

Early Birmingham

It was just open country along the river. There weren't a lot of families at that time. This Judge Collins had an estate and his own houses, where my parents lived, as they were in charge of his estate. They just farmed and sort of supervised the estate. Yes, we lived in Judge Collins' house. His estate was along the river. It was about the first place in Toledo that could be called an estate and he wanted to keep it that way, that's why he was so reluctant about selling any of it. He wanted to keep it as an estate. It was just our family then (living on the estate). My father and what helpers he had, and then as soon as the estate was open for settlement many families came in. After his (Judge Collins') death, his estate went to his nephews, I think. He had no children and they opened it up for development. Streets were laid out and building sites established. The people had a chance to buy a lot and a home.

There were no stores in the early days. The first I can remember having known was a sort of general or grocery store, run by Frank Martin.

Clothing

Of course our clothing was all homemade you know, whatever was warm and suitable. I always had one good dress and an apron, an all-over apron that kept the dress clean. We didn't have a lot of clothes. They weren't available...and we didn't have it. We just had one pair of shoes and that was for all occasions and for all times. I can remember how proud we were to get a new pair of shoes. "What would you wear on your legs?" Stockings that my mother would knit.

School

They went to that district's school. They had to walk a distance. It was perhaps...let me see, two miles out to the district school. That was down two miles..the district school was down Wheeling Street, it was way-out in Oregon Township. "You went to the Birmingham School?" When they built the Birmingham School, I did. At that time it was just the first grade. I was a school girl. later on after we had finished Birmingham School, we had to go down to East Toledo to school and then we used to go on the streetcar. When the streetcars came down from town, then we had means of transportation. Otherwise, up to that time there was no way to go except to walk or to have your horse. The streetcar tickets cost three cents.

I can remember my first grade teacher's name was Snow, May Snow. We had one man teacher, Sam Howland, the only man teacher we had, he was from East Toledo.

We used the McGuffey's, of course, McGuffey's readers and McGuffey's series of school books. We memorized some things, we were taught, of course, the fundamentals of education.

You had to carry your lunch with you. There was no lunch given in the schools like there is today. Or we went home to lunch, school was dismissed at noon, so the kids in the area could go home for their meal.

Recreation

We used to swim, of course, play in the water. And in the winters we skated. We skated on the river and on the creeks that lead into the river. Several creeks ran through the area and we skated on those that would take us right into the..and there was one especially that was called Sleepy Hollow. It was through a wooded area. They used to have horse races down the river, cutter races, from one bridge to another. They'd have races when the ice was thick..thick to hold them. As the river traffic grew, the river wasn't safe.

### Industry and The Hungarians

I can't remember when they (The Hungarians) came. They came with the industries. They (industries) brought them (Hungarians) with them mostly, because they needed them for workmen. There was nobody in the area that was skilled enough to take over, you know, the ship building company. That was the first time that the river frontage was available for industry. They brought them here, they brought their workers with them and then they built buildings, sort of flat-like buildings. Buildings that would house several families. After the ship building industry, after the river frontage was opened for say...for sale, the next industry to come in was the National Flour Mill. They built a big warehouse and then a dock and a boat landing cause they shipped all their flour by boat. All those industries brought in more people and then the Malleable from Cleveland came in, a National Malleable. That brought in the first foreign people. They brought in the Hungarian people to work for the Malleable. They brought in some of their people from Cleveland, they came from Cleveland, they brought in the first of the Hungarian families.

To us they were just as foreign as if they came from the moon. They were really aliens. They dressed differently, of course. The women wore "babushkas" we called them later on. We called them handkerchiefs on their heads then, or shawls on their heads, and they went barefooted, which was fairly unacceptable, and their customs were a problem. Our association with them was very limited by them as well as us.

When the first Hungarian families came they were very industrious people. Every family's goal was to have a cow. If they could have a cow that could supply them with much of their food, you know. They kept them in their area if they could, and they did, and they had a cow, chickens and geese, anything that could provide food for their families. Everyone had a garden. When I speak of the cows, of course, cows had to be fed and most heads of every family, the men would have scythes, you know what I mean, cutting grass and they would...on the ditch banks and any place that there was grass...and let it dry and then eventually make a hay stack so they'd have feed for their cow in the winter. Every bit of land that could be cultivated was cultivated. They were very industrious and tried to be very good providers for their families."

"Did you learn any Hungarian language?" No...just a few words, maybe.

"Did you have get-togethers with the Hungarian people?" No, I don't remember any we ever had. See, they couldn't understand each other, you know. We couldn't speak the language and the Hungarian people couldn't speak English. "When did that change?" I'd say that...I think the children did that when they went to school, they brought that home to their parents, they learned to understand each other through the children.

"Were there any Hungarian members of your church?" Yes, we had some. They weren't denied, but our church, they didn't have a church for a long time, the Reform people, so our church loaned them the building for services. Once on Sunday or for any special occasion like a wedding or a funeral. They shared the building with them. "Did you celebrate holidays with the Hungarian's church?" They didn't have affairs of the kind, not mixed groups, they had their own festive occasions and then they did it their own way. It was separate, each church did it their own way. The Hungarian people followed their old customs from the old country as they said, as they called it, and the American people did it their way.

### As A Teacher

At that time we had a district school, we had eight, all grades to teach, all eight grades to teach. Just in one room. We (the teachers) had to take care of the buildings, do the janitor work and everything.

"Could you describe a typical day in December as a teacher?" You would have to wade through the snow to get there and then build our fire. We had to build our own fire. They had big wood burning stoves. They (the students) came about 3:30 or 9 o'clock, and they were dismissed early because most of them had to walk a long distance to get home.

"What were the qualifications to be a teacher?" We just passed a teacher's examination. If you passed it, you were eligible, we didn't train. We just

trained by experience. You could take it (the teacher's exam) anytime after you finished the eighth grade and if you passed it you could teach. I don't think I was much more than sixteen when I started teaching district school, passed the test, you know. Teachers were much in demand, so you just learned by experience, that's all. (You) just go in and do the best you could. I had pupils that were older than I was, I was only sixteen and I had some boys in class that were about eighteen. I got through all right. Everybody called you "teacher," you know. They didn't call you anything else. You people in this generation can't imagine that, can't imagine how we lived then. "What were the ages of your students?" They started from the first grade all the way up . . . maybe they were from six to fifteen or sixteen. In one school I had seventy-two (pupils). You'd just take one group at a time. I taught about ten years. I taught in Oregon State for two years.

#### Medical Care

We used to take sulphur and molasses in the spring. I don't know why they felt we needed sulphur and molasses. There was a doctor who lived across the river. He would sometimes come over for an emergency. If there was an emergency they would come across the river in a row boat. It was difficult to get him, he didn't, he wasn't very available and I suppose expensive, I don't remember. People didn't have a lot of money, you know, to pay for things. "Who delivered the babies?" We had mid-wives, you know, people took care of it themselves. There were some people that were, some women that were special mid-wives. Not many American people, very many among the Hungarian people, because they had a lot of children, they always had the mid-wives. She was called the "mamishka" and that's Hungarian for, I suppose, grandmother, I don't know.

#### Oregon

I went there to visit some relatives and they needed a teacher in their district and they persuaded me to stay. And I was anxious to do it 'cause I . . . the west was new then, it was just new ranch country, and it was interesting to stay, so I stayed there two years and taught there. "How did you get to Oregon?" By train and by boat. I went by boat from Toledo to what we call the Soo now and then take a Great Lakes boat across Lake Superior to, where was it, and then you'd take the Canadian Pacific Railroad across the mountains to Seattle, then from Seattle by boat down the coast, quite a trip. I came home by train. I didn't go through Canada again. . . just through the states. You'd see the countryside and the mountains and the trails and all that. . . and ranches, the big ranches. . . the west was real new then. . . it was just not like it is today by any means. We stopped at Salt Lake City. . . and some of the western towns. They were very crude, very undeveloped.

#### Courtship and Marriage

He (my husband) lived in another part, he was from Pettisville, I was in Toledo. "How did you meet him?" Through friends. Friends that lived in that area, that I visited, I met him then. In those days there were the interurban cars, the streetcars, they'd run from town to town, you could come down on those cars. He'd come to Birmingham. We'd go to the double picture shows, we'd go to the picture show. The shows were downtown, we had to go back downtown to a picture show. There was only one picture show house in Birmingham. . . they showed pictures some of the time. On Payne Avenue, it was called the Palm, The Palm Theatre. "How much did it cost to go to the picture show?" Ten cents, I think.

I was married at home, in Birmingham, didn't have a big wedding, just a few of the family present. Nothing special, I don't think. We just had family, people didn't go in for big weddings like they do today. The Hungarian people had big weddings, they made a big "ado" about weddings. They'd celebrate for two or three days. They had big weddings.

ELIZABETH SZABO

The original interview with Elizabeth Szabo was conducted by Carol Ann DuBrul on December 19, 1983, with subsequent interviews by Mary L. Sarabia in October of 1984.

The original interview containing questions and answers has been revised into a narrative using questions only to maintain the flow of the narrative.

The narrative was prepared by Mary L. Sarabia in October of 1984.

HUNGARY

My father's name was Albert Szabo and my mother's name was Elizabeth (Fabu) Szabo.

My father came first (to the U.S.). Then he came home to Hungary after he made a little money. He worked in the mines in West Virginia and he came back to Hungary. He wouldn't go to work and my mother says, "There were three children, aren't you going to work?" And he says, "I'm going to tell you something, so let's sleep, and when we get up I'll tell you something." And what he told her was that he was going to take a loan on the house and that they were going to America. So, he wrote my mother, after he got here (America), that she should sell everything to the last nail and follow him with his children.

Well, my father ordered her to come to America. She went to his oldest brother and says, "What is this that he wants me to get rid of everything and sell everything to the last nail?" And my uncle said, "That is your duty to follow your husband because he knows where he can earn a larger piece of bread for his family." And the reason that this man thought it was fine to come to America was because he had two children, a boy and a girl; her name was the same as mine (Elizabeth) and they were excellent students. When they graduated from high school, my mother said it this way, "My aunt, she raised the family on broth", so she could educate her children. When they took the children to enter some college, the college refused to take them. And the reason they refused to take them was that the mother, my aunt, had a sister who lived common law with someone at some time. So, that was the reason they couldn't enter that college. Well, that's just to show that they limited education. It shows that to me. Because if you were once a peasant, you had to stay a peasant.

I remember when we left the village (Nyrapazony). I remember when we went the last Sunday and the minister's sermon was regarding us. He thought it was terrible we were leaving our country because he said it wasn't the right thing to do. And the sermon was about us all the way through and I remember when we left the village, by wagon. We went to Nyireghaza. From there we went to Fiume and that's where we took the boat. And, I remember passing the Rock of Gibraltar. From there we stopped in England; they put meat, food, on the boat for the twenty-two days that we were on the water, which was ridiculous even those days.

It was a regular big boat, it only had one stack on it and they said the name of the boat was..Carpathia, CARPATHIA! And they said that boat was making the last trip. And we came second class which was in our favor because the conveniences are much better. It was supposed to have been as if we were on a cruise.

And, when the time came that we were almost here they notified us that we could see the Statue of Liberty. Everybody went up on deck and some cried, some prayed, and we didn't go down anymore. We stayed there till we got to Ellis Island. I remember that we went on a smaller boat. On steep steps we had to go down where Ellis Island was. And everybody, everybody bought a box lunch for a dollar and we fell in love with apple pie. We just loved the apple pie! So they examined our eyes and we came on our way.

## TOLEDO

The train stopped, my mother stopped in Buffalo. She never saw bananas, bananas fascinated her, and she almost got left. So, we got here to Toledo, midnight, the Union Station. There was quite a few men to greet us. They were my father's friends and I had an uncle that was there and we came by street car. The Strick Building was brand new and it was beautiful. So, about a block away from the street (where they were to live) we got off the street car. My father rented a home for us upstairs, above a saloon, on Genesee and Ann streets. Now it's Bogar Street. And the first thing he did, in the morning, was to go down to Jakcsy's Butcher Shop and he bought a whole leg of veal and he told my mother that he was hungry, she had better get to work and cook. Poor thing, she didn't even know how to make a fire in an American stove.

## HER FATHER

At that time, I remember, the men would only make about seven or eight dollars a week. You never saw your father because he went to work in the dark and he came home in the dark. Worked such long hours. My father died in 1910, I wasn't yet nine years old. He had, they called it consumption, but had acquired silicosis or something from the mines, you know, in Charleston, West Virginia. Yeah, that's what they said, consumption, when he worked in the mines his lungs were filled. I think he was 45 (when he died).

## MOTHER

My mother kept boarders; she had boarders before when my father was living, but not after my father died. She sent them away and she did housework. My mother did housework. She worked for A.F. Mitchell. He was connected with the Ohio Bank. Well, she didn't work steady, she did housework from one house to the other and that's how we got along. Well, I guess she liked doing housework better than to have a bunch of men around. Oh, she had as many as ten (boarders). They just lived on top of each other, I betcha there was four to a room. Not for a room they didn't charge, for them, she did their cooking, she gave them a place to live and she even took care of their money and she used to stick it here (pointing to the front of her dress),...ten cents a day. She even mended their clothes.

She built this house about 1915. When my father died in 1910 my mother had a Bridgeport insurance of \$1,000.00 and she had a Prudential that covered his burial. Just covered it. It was \$280.00. We couldn't have anything. Because she couldn't let loose of the thousand dollars. So, this was in 1910 and in 1915 she built this house and by that time she did have to dip into the thousand dollars and she bought for this lot \$360.00, about 1914 or 1915. Then she had \$350.00 to put on the principal of this house. A man that run a lumber yard gave us the loan, the loan, because they figured between the contractor, who was just new and they thought that she won't ever be able to pay for this house and it would go back to them. My mother just wouldn't let us have anything until this house was paid.

## SISTERS

There were three girls. I was the middle girl. (Julia) She would have been, well, she's five years older than I am, about 89. (And, Vera) she's two years younger than I am, about 83.

Questions: The older sister was named Julia? She left us. At that time it was, well, I might as well say it because it was the way of life. Many children were ashamed of their nationality. (Julia was fourteen years years old when she left home).

Oh, my mother, she almost went insane, and it hurt her terrible.

She didn't want to lead the simple life, my sister didn't. She wanted to get along in the world and she did. And the last we heard, when she became of age, she went to Chicago. It seems that her husband was a hotel manager, a big hotel manager. All I know is that she must have married very well because she came around (Toledo) with a man and there was a Hungarian attorney here and so

then she came to visit this lawyer and she said that, "if my mother needs any help, I'm able to help." That's what they told us. We were, all three of us, working when they came but the neighbors saw her, a well dressed woman and a man were here but we were working. And then she was supposed to have gone to visit this Mrs. Farkas and Mrs. Farkas says, (to Julia) "Why are you calling me, you know where your mother is. You go and you visit with your mother and not me." This is what she told me. From that time on we never heard from her.

It was very common at that time to be ashamed of your nationality. They would change their names. They would change their names to hide it...yes. I found out that she (Julia) used the name S-A-B-L-E, Sable, not Szabo.

(Vera) she got married and she had a son, one son she had. He died first of a heart attack. Her husband had a stroke, he died. She was sweeping snow three years ago, well, she died. She was eighty.

#### SCHOOL

John Jakcsy (the butcher) took me to school. And my teacher's name was Mrs. Siferd. And, I did not pass from the first grade because I could not speak English. So they kept me the second year in the first grade. So, when I went to the second grade, from there I passed. So a boat may have come in from Hungary, there was so many children one morning that the hall was just full of children. And that's when Dr. Guitteau came with a man and a woman, and the principal, her name was Mrs. Moore, picked me to read for these people. So, I read and they let me spell some and then the boy on the other side, the fourth grade pupil read. So, when Dr. Guitteau heard it, he said, "This is where we're going to build the new school." I guess there was another school on the books to build and because this is where we need it. "And I'll see to it that we will have the best force of teachers in the school." In Birmingham School, when the new school got built that's when Mrs. Grather took over. And she was beautiful. It was a larger school. More modern school because we even had cooking facilities and they would have nice affairs in the auditorium. Every-time Dr. Gunkel came or Mr. Gunkel came he'd always stress using a toothbrush just how to use a toothbrush. Well, they just had the boys swear to it that they wouldn't smoke until a certain age. Well, and then, of course, as I went on to the upper grades, I was always a good speller and we used to have spelling bees. I would be on one end and the other end was always Gladys Swells. I would be the last one out but somehow it was in the sixth grade Gladys Swells skipped to the seventh grade and they didn't skip me. That broke my heart. I just lost all interest (in school) because I didn't think that was fair and I knew it wasn't fair, but it may have been my mother's fault too because when my father died in 1910, someone came to my mother and they were going to do something with me, but I don't know what it was, but she refused because she said, "I have no one here, I'm going back to Hungary."

So then Steve Materni got to be the principal for many years at Birmingham School. He got me a job. He got me a job.

#### WORK

Then when I was just fourteen years old already I went to work..and I know that I got a job the day that the war broke out, the first World War, and I worked for the Saxon Manufacturing Company which got to be the Electric Auto-Lite. But there was a state inspector who would spy the children out and she spied me out and she wanted to know how old I was. "I think I'm eighteen." So she says, "No, you're not." So she sent me to talk to the boss. The boss says, "You put your hat and coat on and get out of here because I'll either have to pay \$200.00 or go to jail for you." I was too young to work. See, I was too young to work and so then, they, well, I worked here and there and at 16 I went back to work at the Electric Auto plant. By that time it was Willys Corporation, not the Electric Auto Light. They named it the Willys Corporation and I worked there until they retired me in 1956 due to illness. And since then I've been home.

## NEIGHBORHOOD

One thing I remember is when I was a child on Front Street where Packo's place is now...that's where you entered in the show and it cost us three pennies. So, then the building got so raggedy that they moved the show to Genesee and Consaul Street and you had to go up on real steep stairs and I didn't like the pictures. They were all too fast and they raised the fee to five cents. So, five cents was a lot of money...three cents, we could afford.

And then they had where the St. Stephen's parking lot is, they used to have dances for the young people. These girls would do housework, these immigrant girls that came, and that was a good place for them because they could learn to speak English then and they would have dances for ten cents and it was a happy neighborhood. The girls would parade with flowers in their hair up Genesee Street to the place where they could have speeches and such and we were happy.

When I went to school when I was seven years old there was a Helm family across from Valiquette's on Genesee St. (That's where Ujvagi lives now.) And they had daughters or there were already three or four girls that already had a car! And this was in 1907. I walked and I would see the girls come home from school and that fascinated me. I guess Mr. Helm was the Superintendent at the Malleable. And across the street, Mr. Valiquette, was the foreman, and they were, well, they were respected. I went to school with their youngest. They had three or four boys, they were George, they were Charlie, that I remember, and I know Myrtle because I went to school with Myrtle. It was a good class of people that lived in Birmingham.

There was a Doctor on Whittmore St., Doctor Schriber, he had a daughter and she sat on the swing and played the violin so beautiful and her name was Cornelia and she had a brother Cornell who became Mayor of the city of Toledo. Dr. Schriber, he was a Hungarian doctor but Mrs. Schriber or Cornelia could not speak Hungarian because I would go to the store for them and Dr. Schriber would have to tell what they wanted.

You would go along on Bakewell Street or a different street they had pianos, it was beautiful. It was really a nice neighborhood.

But it seems that as the Hungarians came in, few Americans stayed. They (American families) even sent two of their girls, that I remember definitely, they sent them to the Hungarian Summer School to learn Hungarian. One was Moria Dunn and the other was Wilma Kreger, and they sang beautiful.

## CHURCH

Our minister originally was a teacher. He was interested in teaching us and I remember that I said to our present minister that (because of) the knowledge that I acquired in the summer school it was easier for me to make a living because I could talk about things that an average child or young person couldn't. He would talk, he would even talk on China. He said that China was the oldest culture in the world. And before people knew what porcelain was they could already make fine porcelain. And then he talked about Franz Josef, the present ruler of Hungary. He didn't think too much of Franz Josef because he more or less took everything away from Hungary and he favored the Germans on the other side.

The church was already built when I came, even the Sunday school was organized and I went. Our first minister started building it. I think (he) went to Bridgeport and he came to visit us one time and we had to behave and be real good. And I know that our minister had a beard.

## HOLIDAYS

We didn't have the toys that kids have now...nothing...I had one dime doll, one time, and every bit of thread that my mother had. I wouldn't go out on the street to play but I sewed doll dresses, the best I knew how. And our toys were the jump rope, drop the handkerchief, play jacks, that's all we had. I know one girl, she had a pair of skates. There were two kids that had pairs of skates. I guess one broke, I skated home on Bakewell St. on the (other)skate,

and my mother sent me back with it because that wasn't mine. I remember that see, but I wanted the skate but couldn't have it. Toys were out of the..you know..we'd get a new dress for Christmas, maybe we'd get oranges.

#### CLOTHING

Well the children were better dressed than they were now..the children that I went to school with were well dressed...and I never will forget that I went to school with Moira Dunn and every fall when we would go to school she would have her dresses all ready, finely tailored. It was a good class of people that lived in Birmingham.

#### HUNGARIAN FOOD

Hungarian food is very rich, heavy food. If there was a new flag or something going on, right away the women would cook soup and chicken paprikash, you know, heavy, and stuffed cabbage, that was usually their routine, oh yes. They were great for food, great, but I tell you, when I was in Hungary...I cooked the way my mother did, but you know our food doesn't have the flavor in it that theirs have there, so, something isn't in our food that's necessary to be in.

DATING AND COURTSHIP  
IN BIRMINGHAM DURING THE  
1930's AND 1940's

\*Barbara Torok

\*Lillian Keil

\*Gizella Bochi

The transcript which follows is an interview conducted by Carol Ann DuBrul on February 10, 1984.

Today is February 10, 1984. This is the video tape for the Birmingham Cultural Center. The interviewer is Carol Ann DuBrul. Sharing their memory about dating and courtship in the Birmingham area with us today, are:

B Barbara Torok, born and raised in Toledo, Ohio. Want to know my age: 1907, July 8th. I attended Birmingham's St. Stephen's and my dad was a founder of that church. I attended school there and then I was married at St. Stephen's Church. Later, I joined my present church: St. Michael's Byzantine Catholic Church.

I How about your parents, where were they born?

B My father was born in Autria, Hungary; my mother in Buzita, Hungary.

I When did they come over?

B That was way before my time, it had to be.

I So you've lived in Birmingham all your life.

B All my life, yes.

L My name is Lillian Keil, formerly Kertz. I still reside at 2339 Bakewell Street, which is the place where I was born. On July 30, 1917. I have lived here all my life. And my parents were born in Autria, Hungary, which is now part of Czechoslovakia. My dad came over in 1905. My mother came over in 1907.

G My name is Gizella Bochi. I live at 348 Burger and I've lived in Toledo all my life except for about 4 years as a youngster. We moved to Detroit. I'm the second generation, Hungarian generation, my father was born in Hungary; my mother was American born. And I attended St. Stephen's School and Waite High School, classes at The University of Toledo.

B Her mother is my sister.

I When did girls begin to date in the Birmingham area? When did the girls discover the boys or the boys discover the girls?

B Oh, I knew there were boys when I was in about the second or third grade. I was so much in love every other day. It didn't last very long. It was a blast when we started attending dances about the age of sixteen and our parents had to screen the boys and look out if you brought home somebody that wasn't to their liking.

I Were the parents there at the dance?

B They didn't dare escort us, not unless there were dances in the neighborhoods. They would sit there with their arms crossed wondering who we were going to dance with. Is my daughter going to be asked to dance? And we had somebody ask us, they would be real happy and all evening they thought, "Oh, my daughter's so popular she's being asked to dance. I hope it's going to turn out all right." And if we weren't asked to dance, they felt real sorry for us. That happens. You weren't always popular. If your children are feeling happy you're happy. If they are well screened, heaven help you if you brought anybody over that didn't meet with their approval.

I Where were these dances held?

L It was all in the neighborhood, St. Stephen's would have some program every Sunday, we had the Juhasz Hall, which was on Front Street.

B Then they had a pavilion at Strick's Hall, like a garden like.

L We went to dances over at the Weber Block, on the corner of Front and Main, I believe on the 3rd floor. It was a big auditorium.

I This is when you were about sixteen?

L We started in high school.

I Where else did couples go when they wanted to meet?

G Well, we'd stand on the corner. Take a walk around the block. It'd be a promenade, you know. The boys would go one way. The girls would go the other way. Just like in the Mexican courtship circle and then you pick somebody. Of course, you don't just go snatch them. But you make eyes at them. And before you know it, you are sending little love notes and so forth.

I Did you stay in Birmingham or did you go across the river?

G Well, every chance I got I went across the river. But I'll tell you I was pretty fortunate because I had aunts that were older than myself and I was always a little taller for my age. So, I think I was about 15 when I went to my first dance with one of my aunts. I don't even know which one it was. And of course, by that time I knew my right foot from my left foot so I did pretty good. But, I still could not go alone until I was about 16, 17 years old. I had a couple of girl friends that we would go to the dances with.

I So, the girls would all go together?

G We would go together and then we'd dance with the fellows. The fellows would ask us to dance, you know. We didn't have no dance cards. Nothing formal. But everybody knew that you were going to - the third or fourth dance was going to be with such and such. And then, of course, the last dance was usually the one that escorted you home. Or kind of trailed behind. Of course, we weren't allowed to be brought home by the boys. We always came home, we would go home with girls that brought us to the dance or had gone to the dance with us. But the fellows would sort of trail after us.

I What about Riverside Park?

L Well, there was really not much to do. We didn't have the money to do things. Rather, then the girls from the block over here would meet, after supper and on nice days we would walk across the Ash-Consaul Bridge, which we have no longer there. And we would either go to Franklin Ice Cream - that the express way now replaced it. It isn't there. Or we would go down to Riverside Park to Tony's Popcorn machine that was always parked there. And of course, the boys would always come across there. And they would always escort us home. So there was always a group that would be walking home. And we felt safe. Entirely different from today. But, we always had to be sent home at a certain time.

I Were those Birmingham boys that would escort you across the bridge?

L Oh yes, down here at Reid's was a gathering place. And ah, they would look all the girls over, as they passed. You know, say hello to you and then you would be bashful. And you would hurry along, but there would always be a group there. Hanging out.

I What would you wear on these occasions?

G Well, you would dress up. Because, I tell you, you primped with yourself all afternoon or right before supper so that when supper was over with and the dishes were over, you would make a mad dash out of the house because you had a limited time to stay out and enjoy yourself. But, you wore nice clothes, I mean no jeans, or no sneakers or anything like that.

I Always, a skirt or a dress?

B Always. Ah, not really a skirt. It was a starched dress. Because we had to starch all the time. We had ironing, lasted for two or three days. Everything was starched. Seemed like even our sheets were starched. That was a must.

L You always wanted to wear a new dress to school, so that you would catch the boys' eyes. You wouldn't, you would want your finery.

B One thing I have to add, my mother couldn't understand why we went to dances at nine o'clock. Why did she say it's time to come home? We could never make her understand. "Mom and Dad, they didn't start until nine o'clock."

I Why didn't they start until nine?

B Well, I wish we could have changed that because sometimes it was boring to listen to your mother. Aren't you going yet, aren't you going yet? When are you leaving? Because the sooner you go, the sooner you get back home. And heaven help you if you got home after 12:00. Dad would stand by the door waiting.

L That was curfew. You had to be home by 12:00.

I What happened if you were late?

B We hated that. We'd hate to tell what would happen. We never heard the end of it.

L That's right.

G You felt like you just didn't want to ever go out again. That would be it.

B I wish they had some of that discipline in our children.

I I just want to go back one more time to Riverside Park and the boys who might - Did you ever meet boys outside of the area, from out of the community?

G Oh, yes.

I What happened when they brought you home?

G Well, I tell you, my father was, he was from the Old Country. And he was pretty firm. It was right before the war and, of course, being that he was in the Army, he knew what the soldiers and sailors were like. So, therefore, he wanted to know who the mother was, who the father was. Of course, you don't know the statistics when you first meet a fellow. You don't say, "Hey, you are going to take me home. But, before you take me home, tell me who was your father, what does your grandfather do?" So, therefore, this would be the first question he would ask. Then, if you were fortunate to have a date after the fellow brought you home, and he would ask you for a date, you'd consent to the date. You'd bring him home. You'd introduce him to your father and mother. Of course, all your sisters and brothers would be traipsing around, you know. You couldn't hide them under the tub. So, he'd say, "Who's your father? Who is your mother? What does your father do?" Well, he would just about ask him what his bank account was, for heaven's sake. By the time you would go out on your date, you were so embarrassed that you didn't care if he would ever ask you out again or not.

I How about religion. Did religion affect who you could date and who you couldn't date?

G Definitely!

B Nationality and religion were the two musts.

G I tell you, all kidding aside. Now this might be a slam to some people. If he wasn't Hungarian, and he wasn't Polish, he was a "Hillbilly." And a "Hillbilly" was a cuss word. This was really --

I How about, ah, you refer to your Hungarian background - all three of you had Hungarian backgrounds. Did you have any special - were there special Hungarian events or customs that involved the boys and the girls?

B Oh, yes. This is what I wanted to show you, that picture. We have these Hungarian Szureti Ball Grape Festival and you always had a partner, you had a boyfriend or a partner, that was it. Some of the girls married their partners. That was a good way to get acquainted. But we wore those Hungarian costumes, it was on those days, and we had several of those. This is why we had church fairs. Once a year you'd - this would be the big event.

G This would be the big event.

B And we'd parade all through Birmingham advertising the dance.

G Remember that man that had that wagon with the horse and - Yeh, they'd put the band on the wagon and go through the neighborhood from one side of the street down the other. A Hungarian band - so, yes, yes, advertising that there is going to be a dance. It would start in the afternoon and it would extend way late after ten o'clock.

I And everyone wore Hungarian costumes?

B Yes. Well, everybody that had one. It was in the act, all the young people.

G The dancers, but even some of the others. And then, they would sell those honey cakes, too.

I Where was the dance held?

B Churches. Mainly at St. Stephen's. At St. Stephen's because that was the largest, I think.

L Well, Monsignor, ah, really wanted the young people to congregate and be at the church. Monsignor Eordogh. And so, therefore, we'd always have some doings there, especially with the Hungarian costumes.

G He was from the Old Country. I think he had an ancestry of noble people. You know, like I don't know if he was...if you were connected with...well, nobility. And so he was more refined than the regular run of people you would run up against. And he would try to bring this custom over here.

B That's what they are doing now. But,

I This continues --

G Some of it didn't go over so good - because some of these people didn't want to conform to old school. They wanted to reform to the new way of living in America. And of course, there was a little conflict.

I What things didn't - can you remember anything specific that really did not go over?

G Well, actually right off hand, I couldn't think. But, this brought a lot of difference religion wise. A lot of the fellows that didn't want to be dominated by his stern rule, about bringing the old customs back, they fell away from the church. And, there was quite a few "fall aways" for that reason.

I How about, ah, some of the Hungarian customs that would revolve around special holidays? I am thinking about Easter Sprinkling?

B Oh, yes. That story. That still goes around in existence, because Mr. Nagy at our nutrition center, he came in, he said, "I got to get the water." "You better not." He still keeps it up. Well, we don't act on it. Well, we do. Well, one of our priests there that I have in one of my pictures, he always blesses you, you know, after you receive Holy Communion, and before you leave the church we have to go up for the anointing with the oil. Well, this time instead of the oil, he took the holy water, and you know, we went up there, not thinking a priest would dare . . . .

I But he is an Hungarian priest, right? Right. Let's explain a little bit about this Easter Monday.

L On Easter Monday the boys would come and say a little verse, asking permission if they could sprinkle their daughter. And of course, I love to sleep, I remember this one occasion, and my mother allowed the young man to come into my bedroom to sprinkle me, which was very, very embarrassing. But that cured me from sleeping late, at least on Easter Monday.

I Does this go on with the young people in the Birmingham community today?

G Not, no. . . .

I On Easter Monday?

G Because there is such a mixture, I don't know if it even exists anymore. Not to my knowledge. But I know, talking about Easter Monday - Easter Sunday night before we'd go to bed, my sisters - I have two sisters - "Let's put on our better nightgowns because I think the boys are going to catch us in bed." I had two brothers and they were just tricky enough to leave the boys in. And, so I want a nice nightgown on if they sprinkle me.

I Did the girls ever in the Hungarian custom - did the girls ever get to sprinkle the boys? Or do something in return?

B Yes, the following day. The following day I got even with one of them. I told you that I was . . . He was going past our house, and I laid for him. I had a bucket of water. I lived on Consaul Street, where Packo's house is now. And I saw him coming and so I ran and go get the bucket of water and ran across the street and I doused him. The whole bucket of water. There he stood, he was all dressed in his Sunday-go-to meeting clothes - he looked at me - I think he could have killed me. That time it wasn't funny. But later on, we'd talk about that all the time. "Remember, I could have killed you." We got even with them. Anybody male, that would go by, we didn't care who it was whether he did anything to us or not. We'd get even with somebody.

I Did you always sprinkle the Hungarians?

B Anybody that came along. The males - the mailman. Now they don't do that anymore. But the older ones remember. They say, "Well, let me get a glass of water. Let me, because you'll get rusty unless you are sprinkled."

I Well, that's the background.

G Well, how about the first snow or the last snow fall. I can't remember - no, the last snow fall. Dad would go out and get a handful of snow and wash each of our faces with the snow. So that we don't have blemishes on our face.

I And that was a Hungarian custom.

G Yes, I guess.

I Are there any other Hungarian customs that you can remember from your childhood?

B Oh, we have a whole lot we don't dare tell.

I What about first kisses? We are talking about dating and courting. What about your first kiss, was there a traditional age at which you received or gave the first kiss?

L Not before sixteen. Because there used to be a saying, "Sweet sixteen and never been kissed."

I And it held true.

L Uhm. It did with me.

B Speak for yourself! What my mother didn't know didn't hurt her. Because you wouldn't dare tell. I was so much in love with a certain fellow. Oh he was my pride, oh he was everything. Of course, he didn't know it.

I And how old were you?

B Oh, I was about fourteen or so. Oh that was . . . . . I was so much in love, I thought I would die if I didn't have him. Well, when he didn't return, that was it. And I started looking for somebody else. That went on and on, until you finally met the right one. Which was many, many years later. We dated but it wasn't anything serious. I had a lot of dates and we went to picnics. We used to go on the Greyhound in the City of Toledo excursion boat to Cedar Point. And that's about all we done, I got pictures of all that. The Moonlight Ride.

I Well, tell us about that.

G Well, actually I was only on there once. Because I was too young but then I had aunts, like I say. And I, I always hung around with older girls.

I This might have been the aunt that took you?

B Yes, and I had two other ones. Two other ones, you know. I wanted to go on this Greyhound ride and I wanted to see what it was all about. I mean I was gettin' kind of curious and sawdancing. I thought, "Is this all there is to it?" Then I saw the walking on the deck. . . strolling arm and arm. Well, maybe there's more to it than meets the eye. Of course, nothing happened to me. I was, I just danced, that's all.

I So, there was dancing on the boat?

G Yes. Yes.

I What about other special community events. You talked about Hungarian dances held mainly by the churches. Were there any other community sponsored boy - girl get togethers?

B Well, there were clubs. Like the Sokol Club.

I What do they do there?

B Well, they have the athletic club, which is still in existence. Or, like that was a continuation of the May Coal Club where they first started. And then this Sokol Hall right out the corner which is Fellowship Church now. Ah, they still have gymnastics.

G They specialize in calisthenics and, ah, their idea I think is Slovak. Build the body and then the mind will take care of the body or something like that. But they specialize in the calisthenics. And then they have exhibitions where they ah, exhibited their skill and the calisthenics.

I Is that for boys?

G Boys and girls. Boys and girls.

B And everybody in the neighborhood attended.

G It was different age groups. It was from real young to older persons. It would be surprising now.

B You told of the things that went on in the neighborhood. We couldn't afford... we didn't have no radio or TV. And, there was something going on all the time. You weren't hardly ever bored.

L If we didn't have anything to do, we'd go down to Sokol Hall and see them work out on the bars.

B We had these nickle movies at where our nutrition center is now.

I On Paine Avenue?

B On Paine Avenue. And there was another one on Consaul Street. The one on Front Street where the fire station is now, and we were so poor that there were six of us and five of you. She got all the kids together. She must have had ten. She said, "This is all I've got, a nickel. Come on and I'll let you go in." Boy that was a treat. But ten of us! Ten of us. Ten of us for a nickel!

I What other things did you do besides go to the movies? You'd watch gymnastics. Any sports?

B Well, I went bowling. And, ah, when I had my first date, I was a pretty good bowler. Not outstanding. But I was better than my boyfriend. And this man I married, I, why, I beat all the time. He was so embarrassed, that it kind of bothered me. I said, "I just kind of lay low - not try to bowl my usual scores." And he said, "Let's bowl a fourth game." I said, "I am all tired out, I know you'd beat me now." I said, "That's the end, I win." So, we didn't -- that didn't last long. Because I was too embarrassed. I know I beat him all the time.

G Well, we teenagers, I know, we used to skate on the street, right on our street. I had a pair of roller skates. I don't know how I became that fortunate. I got a pair of roller skates. And all the other kids had roller skates. And the street was nice and smooth. And there's a nice hill, and we skated there, with plenty of street light. You didn't have to go to a skating rink. You skated right on the street.

B They have this marathon, walk-a-thon, or dance-a-thon. And we'd go and we'd spend 12 hours there. We'd buy our lunch.

I Where was that?

B It was at Park. Yes. Where the Cooley Marina is now. At Point Place.

I How old were you?

B Oh, we were out after sixteen, you know, we even had mother know. Because she was very interested. We'd come home, and fill her in about so and so. There was a couple of Hungarian kids there. People that we knew and she'd want to know, "Is he still in the contest?" So, we were allowed, you know, to stay out a little later. Then, we'd go back and we'd tell her we wouldn't be home. Because you expected them to drop out. Well, any minute, any minute now. Well, they lasted this couple -- Bill Hegedus, Joe Hegedus, he was in it. And somebody else. Yes, and she'd be very interested that they were in the neighborhood. So, of course, it ended. Then, we started something else. But seems like there was always something else going on. We weren't bored a whole lot. It was so different than what it is now. Kids go to beer joints, and all that. We just didn't go to any bars. We had home brew. We used to have, another thing -- When I was younger, oh I don't know 17 or 18, we had whole birthday parties. My folks, everybody, they'd have home brew and moonshine. But we weren't allowed to drink that. Not that our parents knew about it. Which we all did sneak a drink now and then. They made home brew. And our parents just loved this. My mother did. And their parents, their father come and he would sort of conduct it. He was sort of a chaperone. Of course, the chaperone was worse than the kids. And they had these surprise birthday parties. It was supposed to be a public secret. You weren't supposed to know about it. And you were caught, dirty clothes or not even dressed sometimes. You know, they would all come in and yell surprise! And these parties would last till morning. In the morning we'd go to six o'clock Mass. My mother used to bake and get all this home brew ready and ice it and all the food we had. I had a couple of these parties. And it went on in the neighborhood. Everybody was invited. Your father and mother were there.

I Early thirties?

B Yes. And we had kissing games - Post Office, that's where I learned all of this.

G Do you remember when they had The Dempsey fight? Uncle John was the first, he was always a nut for electronics and radio things. He made a homemade crystal set. I remember this so distinctly. They all sat around and someone listened in on the crystal set and gave a blow by blow description of the fight. Then they had beer, oh I don't know what all -- sandwiches. They always had ham and chicken.

B As long as your parents saw that you were there. And the parents were right there they didn't care what we done because they thought it was all right because we were having fun. They were so happy they would stay up with us. Till morning, till six o'clock, we got up and went to church and then went home.

I You mentioned Post Office.

B And Spin The Bottle. You would have to go into the bedroom with a boy-friend. What you'd done was your business.

I What about your parents?

B They knew we were going to the post office. But they wouldn't think we'd do anything wrong. We'd do nothing but hug and kiss. I'm speaking for myself (laughter).

I What about other games? Were there other games that you would invite some girls and boys to your home and play other than Post Office?

G Cards.

I What kind of cards?

G Well, actually Rummy because that was the simplest. If you had solo-date... You'd play checkers.

B After awhile radios came in and you'd start listening to that. It was a big thing if you had a radio. Continuous stories, well a continuation... "What comes after this?" Myrt and Marge come on at seven o'clock." You'd be glued to the radio. Listen to how Myrt made out.

I Did you sometimes listen to the radio as a date? As a dating activity?

G Well, if you're referring to me, I couldn't do this. I had younger brothers and sister. And they'd always be around. So you had really no privacy whatsoever. So my mother really didn't have to worry about me.

I Okay, we talked a little about the dating. What about engagements and weddings? Is there one special wedding you attended that you can remember? Maybe with a Hungarian ethnic flavor to it? Did something special happen when a couple became engaged?

G Well, all right, you tell about the way they invited people.

B When a couple became engaged and their marriage was announced they had the best man going around to invite people who were supposed to be at the wedding. They didn't get no cards or invitations. They went from door to door.

I The best man.

B They both carried these little carnival canes, those little thin sticks, the...

I The groom and the best man?

B Yes. Carnations and white ribbons. They went door to door; course we were so anxious to see if we were invited. "Are they coming to our door?" This used to be on a Sunday afternoon. We held our breath. "Are we going to be invited?" We'd hang around waiting. "Are they coming?" Then when they were going to get married, that day, or which day they said, maybe a week later, why they had a band lead the bride and groom to church. Walk to church.

I The whole wedding party walked to church?

B Yes. This one wedding . . . . . two sisters got married. They each had ten bridesmaids. I happened to be one of them. Twenty bridesmaids. They walked to church. It was a big affair. Double wedding. Now they are beginning to have catered food, which they didn't have before. Mrs. Toth used to do the cooking. She is retired now. There were a couple others before. I got some pictures. Those ones there. You'd tell them what amount you wanted. It was the same as what you have nowadays. Your chicken paprikas and your stuffed cabbage.

I Was this at the church? Is this where everyone had the reception?

B In those days it was a must, everybody no matter how poor you were, you had a large wedding. Unless you ran away. Sometimes your parents objected.

You'd run away to Monroe, Michigan. You went to Michigan, I don't know why Monroe, but that was the closest. Michigan was a different state. That was a scandal. "She ran away. She went to Monroe to get married." . . . . . But everybody had large weddings like that. Most everybody.

I Even during the Depression?

G Yes. The service at the meals of the bride and groom, each course the cooks would come out and say a speech and then put the food down on the tables like a special, like if they had, like chicken and stuffed cabbage, then say a speech. And at the next course, they'd say a speech.

I To the bride and groom?

B To the bride and groom. Like a toast to them. I remember this very distinctly, because I had a church wedding. The cooks, Mrs. Kavasanski, she is gone now. She'd wrap her arm with a towel and she'd say, "How about a little donation for the cook that scalded her hand?", and everybody would reach in her pocket and give.

G That was a sneaky little thing she used to pull.

B See they used to pass the basket and everybody put their donation and gift in the basket.

I For the cook?

B Not for the cook. First of all for the bride and groom. Then she came out last and she'd say, "How about it. I scalded my hand, I burned my hand. Would you help me out?" It was funny but it was a tradition. They all pitched in and gave her whatever they wanted to.

G She was funny anyway. She was inclined to, after while she was very tired and she'd take a drink of Kimmel whiskey and then another little drink and then before you knew it she was a little bit, you know. It really went over big because she could really put it on. She went all dramatic on us.

I What about after the wedding? Was it traditional for the bride and groom to stay for the whole reception?

B After so long, say around nine o'clock or so. Not too late. (Remember you never stayed out too late. Even if you were married. I guess our folks keep track of you.) They take the veil off and put a shawl on, a scarf and tie; and that night, you are a woman not a girl anymore. "Konytoztak." Anytime you wore one of those shawls tied in the back, like these peasants do, that means you are a married woman. And that was the end. So you either stayed, but you usually left, and that was kind of a hint for the guests to go because you are, and you had early Mass. From nine o'clock on that's about the time you started, then you had your breakfast, your lunch and you had your big dinner. And all that drinking and all that eating was going on all the time.

I The wedding took place at what time?

B About nine o'clock in the morning. That went on all day. Had to have a breakfast, had lunch, then you had your big dinner.

I All those dinners were at the church?

B Yes, you had to rent a hall because no matter how poor you were it seemed like everybody, unless you ran away and got married in Michigan.

G How about Bowling Green?

B No in Michigan. The law was eighteen.

G Indiana?

B Indiana, but Monroe was the most popular one. Monroe, Michigan.

I What about honeymoons?

G Angola, that's it.

B Honeymooners. You didn't hear about honeymooners in our days.

I What was the tradition?

B Well you went home, or many of them lived with their mother-in-law. Mother or mother-in-law. They went and moved in. Or else, if you were alone, this was it. You started right there. Went back to work and resumed life as it was before. We didn't hear of honeymoons then.

I What about World War II? How did World War II affect dating in the Birmingham area?

B That was terrible. I worked at the propeller plant and anybody that would ask me for a date I asked them are you a "4 F'er or are you married? Cause if you wasn't, that was something else wrong with him. Why weren't you in service? That's the first thing. We had parties, but just for that one evening. We'd have a good time and that's it. We wouldn't date anybody. Because we just didn't trust them. We thought that these fellas in service were "it." These leftovers, who want them? We didn't want a married man and we didn't want a "4 F'er, 'cause there was something wrong with them.

G My father fixed me up real good because he, like I said, was in the Army. He knew what these soldiers and sailors were like. Of course we had Bay View Armory and Camp Perry close by. So you know what Toledo was like. So I was starting to date and run around, you know, dances and everything, so he says, "Okay, you either go to school or you do something about your life." He says, "You can't run around with these guys cause you don't know who's married and who isn't married and how many kids they got at home." So I thought, well it's either going out to the university cause I already graduated from high school. The university was so far out and I was working everyday, I was working in a war plant. So I decided I was going to take something to occupy my time, that was cosmetology. So that's how I got into being a hairdresser. I never realized that I was going to make a living at it but he made me join school because he objected to the fact he didn't want these fellas hanging around.

I How about you Lillian, how did it affect you?

L Well I got married just before the war. I had a job and I met my husband, we worked at the same place and I started dating him. So he thought if he got married the draft wouldn't catch him right away. We moved up the wedding date so he wouldn't have to go to service. But, after we were married three years he finally got called.

I If you can think back in your memory. If you could pick out one special date that you can remember, one special dance or special somebody. Maybe your first date. What would it be in the Birmingham community?

G I know, I could never forget this because we still laugh about it. My first New Year's Eve dance and it was at Palladium Hall. It was a nice hall at the time that had a very nice band. Everybody was there that you knew and when twelve o'clock rolled around everybody was kissing everybody. And I never received so many kisses in my life. The next morning I wondered, gee, I wonder if I missed somebody. That stands out in my mind.

I How about you Lillian? One special, your first date?

L I can't even remember my first date.

I Barbara?

B Well, we went to the Commodore Perry Hotel and my date who later became my husband. His sister married a Greek and they had one of these Greek dances with all Greek music. They had red carnations that you were supposed to wear on your lapel. He asked me for a date. I felt honored going to an expensive place like that. It was a fund raiser. He said, "No way I'm going to wear that big carnation in my button hole." You know he was the first one who bought the carnation and wore it. We were having a good time and then he proposed to me. That will stand out in my memory forever.

I Can you remember one special date?

L Nothing extraordinary.

G As an afterthought. Talking about weddings and the war. When she got married I remember because I was a bridesmaid. We had to get ration stamps for food. And we had one heck of a time getting all these ration stamps to get the food together for the wedding. 'Cause you didn't have catering you just . . .

I How did you do that?

G Every relative was hit up for stamps and everybody's fall-out shelter was raided...to provide for the wedding. But everybody was very accommodating.

I Were there things you couldn't get?

G Yes. And some things you could get but you had ration stamps to return for it. . . . butter, sugar, meat.

B And if you knew somebody -- I knew Anna who had that grocery store on Front Street and I did her a favor. So when she got married I was in her wedding. So when she said anytime you need anything let me know. So under the counter, I'd have all I need. We used to serve ham for breakfast. But we'd have to fill in with bologna or coldcuts to stretch your ham. But we did have it. I don't know how then we had beer. Everything was rationed then. You could take only so much of that. My brother was kind of overseer and he was so angry because some people would get a bottle of beer because it was free. They would drink half of it and sit it down after drinking only half and set it down... Wasted all of that. That made him very angry because others were dying . . . . I don't know, everybody had a wedding. I don't know how we managed but it's amazing how people are so helpful at a time like this. Just like a funeral, everybody pitches in, even your enemies. They bring food to your house. They prepare, Mrs. Rutkai made me a bushel of Csoroge, ya, she did.

G I made a clothes basket full. I mean if you could envision what a clothes basket of Csoroge looked like.

B Things were cheap.

G Yes, they were cheap but still if you didn't have the money to buy it..

B Somehow you managed, I don't know how, but my mother, you know, she donated whenever there was a funeral or wedding. You managed somehow. You often wondered how.

I Was it mainly your church group that got together and supported?

B Neighbors. Neighbors and your relatives. Like now when there is a funeral, somebody dies in your block, we don't do that anymore, cause there are so many different people who moved in. I'm one of the last ones around here. We'd go collect for Mass and flowers. You'd go to every door. Everybody was so willing to donate. So you get a large spray from the neighbors of Bakewell Street and then you'd have enough for a couple of Masses. Well, they're ethnic. If you had a wedding, all the neighbors lived in your block, besides your relatives, would all pitch in and help you out.

I Were there any special gifts that were given at the weddings?

B You had pillow cases until they lasted you the rest of your life. Sheets, that was a must, and aprons.

I Were they hand embroidered?

B Most of them.

G Crochet.

B We didn't like them, cause we still have a few and we get up in the morning you have the imprint of the lace on your face. I could hardly wait to get rid of it. I don't want no embroidered pillow cases, to imprint on my face in the morning. The wrinkles are bad enough!

I Once you were married and living in the neighborhood did you continue to go to dances and the sports events with your husband?

B Some did and some didn't. Depended upon circumstances. When we did it 'till the children arrived. Then of course we didn't have babysitters. You either took the children with you or, if you had. . . her mother used to babysit New Year's Eve, that was a must. Relatives...you just didn't hire anybody. Seemed like relatives or you took them. I took my little son to Sokol Hall to a wedding. He was only a couple of months old then. He was so hungry he wanted to chew on chicken bone, I was afraid to give it to him. But I did give him the bone and he would just really suck on it. Drew a lot of attention, "That was the first chicken you've eaten, first wedding you've attended." We took pictures of him.

G It wasn't unusual for the whole family to go to a dance, kids and all. 'Cause you just didn't hire babysitters. That was just unheard of.

I So you would see married people and whole families at these events then?

B Oh sure, all the time.

I How has the, in your opinion, the dating and the courtship changed in the Birmingham area? If you just think about it, what are some of the places that you went to that are no longer here?

G The theaters. Tivoli Theater was my Saturday or Friday night date.

I Were there a number of theaters?

G Well, that was "The One," that was the newest, the most popular, because Palm Theater was already kinda run down. They didn't have it in full operation, where the Tivoli Theater was a full time operation, a family-owned concern.

B It was a new building. It was larger than the Palm Theater. The young people wanted to go to the Tivoli, the newest theater. I think they (The Palm) weren't in operation long after the Tivoli opened up. It was just too much competition. Then they closed their doors. Then we started bowling. It seemed like, I took my nieces and nephews and we started bowling. Course we went roller skating. It seemed like we always found something to do. If we didn't do nothing else (my mother wouldn't go for this, which I objected to), reading. She couldn't stand to see us sitting and reading. You had to embroider and crochet and I swore if I ever got married I'd never touch a piece of embroidery or crochet.

G Now my dad was of another generation. He encouraged reading. "What you know nobody can take it away from you. Only God," he would say.

I Any difference between the way the girls and the boys were treated?

G In what way?

I In outside activities, either bowling, reading. . . ?

G No, really. A girl was always a girl. A boy was always a boy. A girl was supposed to be a little more frail, not as . . .

I Did you have to come in earlier than the boy child?

G Well, I don't know about that because I was the eldest. I had the "Major Domo" thing over them. So I couldn't say.

I Lillian?

L Well, there was too much of an age difference between me and my brother. So he had his dates and could stay out later where I had to be home by nine o'clock. They always knew where to find me cause we used to gather here on the corner of Bakewell and Craig, in front of Bodaks Store. And we would play games there.

I What kind of store was that?

L It was a used furniture store.

B Right on this corner, this block.

G Remember, they had the fellas gather after, I think an aftermath of this gathering on Front Street, Belegrin's gas station, the fellas would line up there, they'd be all dressed up on a Saturday night and they would sit in front of the gas station, or hang around the gas station or whatever. They would just watch the girls go by I think. But they were all dressed up. That was their out. I could almost tell you the fellas that would stand there.

I Why don't you tell them.

G Well two of them are dead right now. Hattie Zubrick. . . Jim Rutkai would stand there, 'course he's alive. Neighbors; I've known these fellas. But I remember them distinctly standing there just watching the girls go by. And they were all dressed up! You would think in front of a gas station they would be all dirty.

B That was a night, Saturday night, they would dress up.

G "Where you goin'?" "Down to the gas station."

I When the girls walked by, how were they dressed?

G Nice, Sunday best.

B Starched clothes, starched dresses. Always. We didn't wear anything like this. It was all starched.

I Okay, thank you very much.

ATHLETICS IN BIRMINGHAM  
1930's - 1940's

\*Emery "Inky" Kolibar  
\*Mike "Mickey" Dandar  
\*Joe "Fudgie" Wlodarz  
\*Steve "Sos" Sosko  
\*John Monoky

The transcript which follows is from a video taped interview conducted by Carol Ann DuBrul in 1984.

The interviewer is Carol Ann DuBrul. We are seated in Monoky's Cafe, 307 Whitmore, one of the last surviving neighborhood businesses to have sponsored a sports team in the Birmingham neighborhood. The men who will be sharing their memories of athletics in the Birmingham neighborhood with us today are:

E My name is Emery "Inky" Kolibar and I was born just a block and a half from here on Genesee Street. I was sportswriter for the American Hungarian paper for 10 years starting in 1933, and I followed the sports in my time very closely and I enjoyed all of them.

M My name is Mike "Mickey" Dandar. I was born in October of 1921; born, raised and still live about three blocks from here. My parents came from the old Austro-Hungarian Empire and their town now is part of Czechoslovakia. I played two sports, but softball was my major one.

J My name is Joe "Fudgie" Wlodarz, I was born on July the 4th, 1912. My parents also came from Austria. Only two of us are left out of 12 children. I was very active in all sports and I coached for over 50 years, young and old. In my 72 years on the East Side our teams in all sports won 75% of the city titles.

S My name is Steve "Sos" Sosko. I was born in September 1911. I live in this neighborhood about 3 or 4 blocks from here. I participated in nearly all the sports they had in the neighborhood. My parents were born in Czechoslovakia.

I Alright, after a league game did you often come to Monoky's?

S Well, after league games, it all depends who you played for. If you played for Monoky's, your team would come over to Monoky's. If you played for Playdium, your team would go to The Playdium. If you played at the Maroda's, or anybody like Birmingham Drugs, you'd go over to the Birmingham Drug Store.

I What did they have to drink there?

S Just what we're drinking right now.

I And what kind of conversation would go on after the league game?

E They didn't do too much bragging but they laid it into the guys that made the errors or that they thought they weren't good enough. They blamed the guy for losing the game.

M Of course there was also a quantity of beer consumed and the remarks got very boisterous after awhile. But the fellow who goofed up usually caught heck from everybody. I wanted to say that there wasn't too much argument because I'm happy to say the type of athletes we did have won 90% of our games.

I What kind of sports were played here in the Birmingham neighborhood? Football?

S Well we had football, we had baseball, softball, basketball, bowling, they even golfed, and boxing, and a lot of you played in the parks. You played volleyball, water polo.

E But Steve, I think it would be a good idea if you started off with first of all football and baseball which were the most popular in the very beginning. Especially our football team, and then our church baseball teams.

S In golf and softball we mentioned John Monoky's place and there was a team called the Modern Woodmen and a team called the Interlake Irons, the Standard Oil team, the Nagy's on Front Street, the Basch Jewelers, Unitcast, Columbia Concrete Block. The Church teams-St. Stephen's, Holy Rosary and Hungarian Reform, they all had teams. This was in the 30's we're talking about now. These were the most popular of your softball teams. Your football was, let's say, between 1920 and 1930's, at that time we had the Eclairs, the Eagles and the Birmingham Ads.

I Was football the most popular sport in Birmingham in the 1920's?

S From the 20's to the 30's it was just about the most popular.

E Then after that the young fellows started going to high school, they started going to college and they started playing football with some pretty good teams all over the country. Let's not forget baseball also because you had Mr. Suto of Suto's, St. Stephen's, St. Emery team, the Nagy's on Front Street again, May Coal, Western Manufacturing; these were all teams from our neighborhood here...Unitcast, Skinner Brothers. Those were the two biggest sports, baseball and football. Then when you got into the 30's we brought in the Birmingham All Star League which was founded by Steve Juhasz and eighteen teams from the neighborhood, backed by the neighbor businessmen who were Stefan's Cafe and Lukie Rollers, Orosz Meats, Birmingham Drugs, Gyurcsiks, Reids confectioners and the Question Marks. Then another big sport was bowling. Bowling in the 20's to the present time was very popular sport and they also bowled a lot of small pins. The first lighted ball diamond was played at Grant Murray Field in East Toledo on Earl Street with 12,000 people in attendance.

I Where does the audience come from, mainly the neighborhood?

E The neighborhood. Nagy Motor Sales were from our neighborhood. We were at one of the opening games. (M. Weiler Homes public housing project is on the site at the present Grant Murray Field.)

I And that was what, 1934?

E What he said was that they had 12,000 people, some retired from the Edison Company, but a lot of people came out to see the lights at night -- That's just a joke.

S Not only that, if you hit a ball in the outfield you never saw it.

E Even if the lights were bad.

S That's like the House of David when they came to Swayne Field against the Mud Hens--they put up their own lights. When they hit the ball in the outfield you didn't know where it went.

I Okay, let's go back to football and describe the uniforms and the equipment that you played with, of the early football?

S Fellows who wore football pants in those days had those bantam stays. Most of the fellows would have cape wrapped around their pants because they were fragile and ripped and everything. You just taped everything and more tape. Your shoulder pads, well, you put cotton or something up in your shirt and that's what you used for shoulder pads. A fellow had a pair of new shoes, you better hold on to them because you might not find them the next day.

J Our kids here started as the Toledo Blades. They sponsored a light weight team then they went to light heavy weight and then to heavy weight football and our idols were the Birmingham Boosters. That was our goal, to beat them someday and they did after three tries. Beat them 6 to nothing in the 6th quarter game at Swayne Field. They had to put the lights on and the first in overtime football and that's the only football game ever played in 6 quarters in the United States and it was, believe it or not, also in the Canton Hall of Fame - and, by the way we won 6 to nothing.

I When was that? Can you remember that game?

J 1934.

I Can you remember some of the best players on the football team? Did any of them end up in the pros or go off to college ball?

S We had Andrew Farkas, who went from St. Johns to The University of Detroit, then onto The Washington Red Skins. We had Steve Toth. He went on to Northwestern ...we had Alex Urban, he went to South Carolina. Then he was with Green Bay. Then there was Curtis Johnson, graduate of Waite High, played with Miami Dolphins. That's about all I can think of.

J Just on football, I'd like to mention the caliber of players that we did have - that if they were playing today that at least one-third of them would be playing pro football and they'd be signing million dollar contracts also. Cause I know and that's the truth.

I Didn't Knute Rockne comment on one of your players?

J Andy Vanyo. He played in Ypsilanti. He was rated one of the greatest linemen.

S Didn't that little college of Ypsilanti play at the University of Michigan one time at an opening game say Andy Vanyo was the outstanding star of both teams?

J Not only that, I'd like to mention that it had to be put in the paper that Andy Vanyo "ok'd" it that the University of Michigan used to play double headers opening day in Ypsilanti and they thought they'd just mow them down; but they only beat them 7 to nothing and a bunch of ball players that played with Ypsilanti went to Waite high school.

I Where were these games played - only on one field?

S Well, in our neighborhood it was Birmingham field...the football, that was the field, they charged admission: 50¢.

E Then if you wanted to sit down, it would cost you an extra quarter. You had to stand during the whole game.

J One thing that should be mentioned, today, the way the modern equipment is is nowhere what we had, yet . . . . . we played 60 minutes offense and defense. Now they have special teams.

M But the baseball and softball games were in Collins Park Interlake Iron Field, Birmingham School and the Firegrounds on Front Street.

E But the big softball games were at Bakewell Field.

J That's right. The best in town.

I That was during The Depression wasn't it?

E That was during The Depression. No team meetings. No people. You went out to see the ballplayers. They saw good games too.

S Even baseball attendance on Sunday afternoon. The reason why Swayne Field never had the attendance that they should have had because there were so many sandlot teams in those days-all the people-it was for nothing in the parks. Everybody here from the East side would go to Collins Park to watch the teams play. They'd go over to Wilson Park when Toledo played Sunday at Swayne Field. They drew, but they could have drawn more because of all the amateur teams play. You imagine they passed a hat among the spectators to collect money, 5 or 10 cents, 25¢ to pay the umpire. One year we split \$48 a piece, our team.

I How did you spend that?

S Well, it didn't last long.

I What about your softball uniforms, talk about the cleats, balls, and the special equipment.

S Well, in softball, when we first started, they had what you called an out-seam ball. It was a ball that was sewn from the outside but it wasn't a ball you could hit too darn far. And when you did hit it you would hit those seams underneath or you'd hit it underneath or over top; and as far as baseball shoes and softball shoes, you put down your own spikes in your own regular shoes.

E A lot of them played in tennis shoes. They're going back to that now.

S Your gloves were small in comparison to what they are today. As a matter of fact, some of the ball players used to cut out the inside of the glove so the ball would stick in their hand.

I How do you feel about that, Fudgie? Compare the glove of your day with the glove of today.

J The gloves today compared to what they used to have are so big now if you do make an error and miss one you could send it back to the factory and they'll send you a new one.

I What about a sport club, was there a sports club around and how would that be done?

S Well the May Coal Club which we talked about before....

I Started in The Depression?

S During The Depression and it was taken care of. Joe Trudeau, owner of May Coal Co. offered the building to the fellows that weren't working, as a matter of fact, nobody was working. And he says, "If you want the building, go in and clean it up. Play cards whatever you want," which we did and we formed a boxing club.

I You set a ring up?

E We set a ring up, a regulation ring and punching bags.

S One thing you can add is that we used to have societies like the Holy Name Society that started a little later and that helped our sports.

I Then the churches helped as well as the industries and businesses?

J Yes. The churches did.

I Let's talk a little bit about the boxing. I saw pictures of a boxing ring outside-not in the building. Can you tell us about that?

M The picture I saw, it was taken....they closed off Bakewell Street between Paine and Craig. And the May Coal Club was located on the corner of Bakewell and Craig so they blocked off the streets, set up a ring, and that's where they used to hold their amateur boxing matches. I can remember a Yonnie Hornyak, Alex Cerveny, George Kerekes, Johnny Ousky, Tony Ousky-some of the fellows went on to the great glory. Steve Shea was city lightweight champion at one time. Louie Haines, what weight did he fight? He was also a lightweight fighter, city champ.

E Joe Packo was a heavyweight, right? Joe was a heavyweight.

M Steve Demeter was another one from the neighborhood that fought at the May Coal Club. Later he went into the Navy and he was fleet champion. I don't exactly remember the year...in the 30's.

J Mike Daniels beat any carnival fighter that they ever put up when they used to bring them in town.

S They boxed quite a bit up here at Front Street Gardens. That's the truth.

M The present Playdium, upstairs.

S Every Monday you would have fights up there. And you would have fights in Birmingham Field in the open.

J East-side wide.

S Then you had Eddie Marks on Front and Main that was nothing but a training station for all your boxers. A lot of our fellows went to the May Coal Club went up there...back and forth.

I What other things happened in the May Coal Club? Boxing was held there. What other events?

S You had softball and you had basketball then you had your pinochle tournaments-cards.

I Any of you gentlemen play pinochle?

M I think everyone in the neighborhood played pinochle from the time they could sit at a table.

S The reason why we got that club was we used to play at Birmingham School and it was raining one day and that's when Mr. Trudeau gave us the building to fix up so we could play cards there instead of getting wet at Birmingham School.

I Now I've heard about men in sports; what about women in the Birmingham area?

S We had the May Coal girls team. Softball team. They had a very good team.

I Who did they play?

S I don't know exactly because there weren't that many girls, you know what I mean?

J They were good.

S We had quite a few girls.

M Some of the dairies sponsored girl softball teams and my sister played with Dolgin Dairy, that's the only one I recall right now. Clara Horvath played with her, Julia Liszak they were city champs a couple of years. My sister is pretty well noted in bowling circles around town. My sister's name is Mary Duricek and she is still bowling to this day at 65 years old.

I What about your wives and girlfriends, how did they feel about the sports?

S Well, let's put it this way, my wife she was an instructor in Sokol Hall, in gymnastics. She was in charge of all that. She came out second in Chicago in the 30's. She came out second in gymnastics. They had them all over the United States and even Europe and Czechoslovakia. Those write ups, we have them all at home, and all the pictures from that, but she was what you called the instructor who was in charge of the gym team.

J My wife played basketball and when I saw her in uniform that was it. I knew I was going to get married. No question about it. The real thing is that they were one of our best boosters. When we lost there was no supper, that's all there was to it.

M My wife was not truly a sports fan because she'd go to the game, she'd sit there with the kids and talking with the other players' wives, and on the way home she would ask who won.

E My wife did not play sports.

I Did she come to see them?

E Well, I took her out golfing one time and we walked the first nine holes out to Collins Park and she went home and left me to finish.

M I have an incident in 1948 when I was playing with the VFW. We won the district and the state championship in softball and then the national tournament was held in Texas. Well, my way was being paid and I asked my wife if she wanted to go. I would have to pay her way and she said, "I would rather have a sewing machine." So she got the sewing machine. Speaking of going down to Texas to play ball, this is the team from 1948, I don't know where the trophy is. (Note: Someone points off camera.) I can't see that far back. That's the trophy we won in Texas at the national VFW tournament. We had a little accident. (Note: Shows picture.) I'm here: in fact Steve's

younger brother, Fritz played. Here are...I think there's sixteen of us on here and with the exception of one fellow we all lived in the neighborhood. We lived within a  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile of each other. We played ball together for about 5 or 6 years before we won the national tournament. The next year we went back we were defending champions. We got beat and the year afterwards we went to Iowa in the national tournament and we won that one, but then we won it in '48, and lost in '49, won it in '50 and then we lost in '51 but when we were down in Texas it was quite another incident. Sammy Szemetko was living down there at the time and they put us up in barracks with all the other teams from Minnesota and Colorado. You couldn't leave anything laying around so Sammy knew of an Army officer who had about a 15-room house and he fixed it up so we could stay at his house. The odd thing about it was the officer had just come back from Germany with a Great Dane dog and the dog could only understand Hungarian because the caretaker on the estate was Hungarian. That dog had the time of his life with us giving him commands. Everyone on the team knew Hungarian to some extent. We had a couple of Italian fellows who lived in the neighborhood, a couple of Slovaks, but they all knew the baseball signals in Hungarian, too.

E So you drive the dog mad, huh? (laughter)

M He was happy to be able to converse with someone.

J This has to be mentioned. The ace pitcher was Fritz Sosko, brother of Steve. He was a great pitcher himself. He taught his brother and I did too while he was in grade school. He worked at the Toledo Blade and called in sick when he went into the tournament and when the Toledo Blade happened to read about him pitching the ball games to win a national title, I don't know what kind of an excuse he had when he came back to work.

I He didn't lose his job though?

M No, no he's still working there.

S Why, I wanted to bring that up, we had some of the great bowlers...a lot of great bowlers out of this neighborhood, I mean they were very good. Lou Farkas, Johnny Magdus, John Monoky, Joe Kristof was a national favorite, Joe Veres over at Southwyck, Dick Sendi, who just passed away, and Duke Drotos, who ran the Playdium at the time, and Steve Novak, Paul Sands.

I Where was the bowling in the neighborhood?

M It first started at Maroda's, two doors from here used to be the bowling alley here. The big pins we set up by hands, there were no machines.

I John, Mr. Monoky, we're talking about bowling. This is your sport! We're talking about bowling, Mr. Monoky. Was there a bowling alley right next to the cafe?

JM Two doors down, three alleys.

I Duck pins?

JM No, no, regular ten pins, My dad had that....this place was built in '24. He had it about 3 or 4 years before that. He used to have an all-star league. In other words, all you could have was two teams on a shift, so you had a 6:30 shift with 2 teams then you had one at 9:00. The place was like a little cooler and people used to stand on the coolers and everything and watch them ...a handful of people. It was a big thing in those days. And we got them all shirts.

I Did you ever bowl a 300 game?

JM One. I think it was 1958.

S John, did you ever bowl 800?

JM One, 811. I had a 299 and a 290.

M What did it feel like, John, when you bowled a 300? Were you nervous? Was it first game, second or third game?

JM It was funny. I hit the first 9 and I went up to the "I want a Canadian Club." Before I ordered it the fell there's somebody that got 9 in a row," and I said, "T give me a club and I'll have another one and I'll take

J The reason for that, wasn't it, John, was after you had the Canadian Club you seen 20 pins? You got to get 10 out of 20! (laughter)

JM No, no.

I Did you have a special uniform?

JM We all had beautiful uniforms; it's fallen by the wayside, I guess it's too expensive. You don't see too many in just an ordinary league. All-stars' leagues get uniforms. It's very rare now in house leagues. I bowl in the Sports Center Major League on Wednesday nights and I don't believe, I don't think there's three teams that got just shirts even.

S Years ago when you bowled, every day in your newspaper there were marked scores of your league and today you don't have none of that, only in the travelling league, but that was in every day in those days. The News, Bee, Times and The Blade. Now that was a pretty tough job to have all those scores in the paper. Tom Bolger was one of the best foreman because he kept that up for years. And Tom didn't miss anything.

I Did you cover any of the bowling?

E No I was most involved in baseball, football.

M Then wasn't there a bowling alley on Front St. up there by the shipyard?

JM Four alleys.

M Didn't it have machines or did they set by hand?

By hand.

I How many places in the neighborhood had bowling?

JM Three, four.

I How many now?

JM Well, they never had what you call a regular amount of alleys like eight. These were nearly four. (Interviewees examine a picture)

I That's 1908. Can you identify any of these people?

JM I know one guy on there, Old Man Simko, John Simko, right here. Genesee Street right there. Look at the one in the middle, Jackie Gleason.

I This one is the one?

JM This one is Mr. Simko.

I Is he alive today?

JM No. You notice the white on his shoes here. That happens to be mud. Because the streets weren't paved. That's why. In those days you walked through the mud. Look at the lighting system. A hundred watt bulb I think. I don't know if it's that good.

I Wooden sidewalks, those were awhile back.

M I remember when Whitmore Street was paved. Bogar was about one of the last ones.

I We talked about your big game and what about your Texas Championship. What about some of the other best games, the ones that in your memory stick out as some of the real...Tell us about the sport...

S We, I played with the Crimson Coaches. We were the world champions in 1935 in softball. Out of the nine men that played, five of them were from our neighborhood, and that was Francis Lengel, Ekie Horvath, Duffy Alstine, myself, and Crip Rejent who was from another neighborhood but he had a girl in this neighborhood so he played with us. So we travelled, we played three

years with the Crimson Coaches and we were taken on a trip for six weeks through Florida, paid expenses, and paid \$25.00 a week and all expenses paid. That was 1936. We played 40 games in Florida; we won 34 out of 40. And then from there, we all developed the Modern Woodmen team; it was one of the first teams that was put in the Class A Federation here in Birmingham, and we won the championship.

J From there our teams were sponsored by neighborhood businesses and we won championships. Monokys, Nagy Motor sales, Playdium, VFW, and teams like that, that were sponsored from our own neighborhood boosters, they won the title too.

I We talked about the depression and how that affected the sports. What about World War II? How did that affect the sporting leagues in the neighborhood?

M I have no idea because I wasn't here. You can see that I'm younger than these fellows here. I'm not saying that they're over the hill, but I am younger. (laughter)

S Well you didn't have the caliber ballplayers during the war because most of the players had to serve, so you had to play with what you had. You had to maybe put older fellows and maybe younger fellows and real young fellows, to substitute.

E But it wrecked the sports for those four years, absolutely, there wasn't too many sports played.

I You covered the sports at that time?

E Up to a couple of years of the war and I resigned.

M Well I think another thing that would of affected it, like as I say I wasn't here, but I heard quite a bit about the gasoline rationing and the food rationing and I think that would of prevented teams from going to different neighborhoods to play. I know that there were teams in the neighborhood, but let's face it, the cream of the crop was gone to the service.

S If these young fellows during the Second World War would travel on buses and streetcars like we did in the 30's, which we did, we'd take a streetcar to go to Highland Park and go on the streetcars and sometimes when we got finished with the ball game we never got home till nine o'clock at night. We'd have to take a streetcar and a bus or two streetcars to come from Highland Park.

JM How about Ottawa Park? We challenged you guys and we walked home from Ottawa Park after the ball game.

I How far is that?

JM Down Bancroft to Cherry... (laughter)

E Remember one time we took two cabs, from some place, and he drove us all the way to Birmingham from across town and they had a special: a dollar to anyplace within the city limits. And that's all we gave the cab driver. And he was mad as hell.

M They had those big taxi cabs. They used to call them seven passenger taxicabs at the time and we had 12 players on the team, and each one of us would chip in a nickel and give the cab driver 60 cents and twelve of us would squeeze into the cab. Because none of us were old enough to drive a car, even if we were old enough, we didn't have one.

S We didn't have one. There were very few cars. If you did go with a guy to a ball game that had a car, it would have to be a car without a top; it would have to be a roadster, or a what do you call them without the top, because then we had running boards on cars then, so then you would have maybe three on one side and three on the other, three in the rumble seat and three in the front seat, so you sometimes would end up sometimes with 12 ballplayers.

J If they fell off the running board they wouldn't play. (laughter)

S Well, you would be surprised. I don't want anyone to be morbid but we had fellows on running boards that got killed. Willie Toth's brother. Going to Forest Park.

I On their way to a game?

S Yeah, inside swipe, things like that.

J Of course they used bicycles. We forgot that.

S Yes, but how many guys rode bicycles to ballgames? Maybe you did.

J I never let you use mine. (laughter)

S But, like I say, it wasn't all peaches and cream.

I Well, what was generally, what are your feelings about the effect on the neighborhood, on the community? What effect did these sports have on the community?

M Well, I think it helped to hold the neighborhood together. Because I can remember before we even had a radio much less a television, my kids can't believe that we never had television when we were young. And when I tell them we didn't even have a radio that was something. The neighborhood would stick together, and also there's pride in the accomplishment, especially if you went out of the neighborhood and how many city championships that this neighborhood teams won. And I think this is what helped the neighborhood stick together, become known and even to this day when Birmingham is in the paper, people will say I was born and raised there. I know someone there and I think this was a very good thing, a very good age that we grew up in.

J One thing you didn't have was vandalism and crime that you have today. Very rarely. If you could give your neighbor a key you were protected. Now you can't give your neighbor a key 'cause you'll get robbed.

S No way would you leave your door open.

M Not only open but unlocked. But, I think the religion played a bigger part in the neighborhood in those days than it does today. The minister, the priests, used to patrol the neighborhoods in the evening; they saw someone they thought was...didn't have any business in the neighborhood and they question him. Now even the police don't have that power.

I What about ethnic rivalry? Were there any of those that you fought?

M St. Stephen's was always battling Holy Rosary.

S Well, I mean it wasn't that big because after a year or two, they combined. They all got together; that made good teams. Because all that rivalry and everything when put them together you got the best of them. That is why I say there was not that much rivalry and the only rivalry was between Birmingham Ads and Birmingham Boosters. That was what you say. . . You called it "blood."

E Well, Steve, even if you went across the bridge to Riverside Park to use the swimming pool sometimes you would get beat up, because you were from the east side and that was their swimming pool and we didn't have one at Collins Park at that time.

S And, Emery, you got to remember when people from the north end would come over to the east side, they came to see the girls, and actually when they came to see the girls the boys from the east side would make sure they would never make dates. They'd chase them back. Back across the bridge.

E You're talking about a different kind of sport. (laughter)

M Referring to that picture, the V.F.W. that we had, we had fellows on there, 16 players from all four different churches in the neighborhood, so that's... as the fellows grew older, they kind of mingled and hung around together, played together. The rivalries of the younger ages were forgotten.

I In 1977 Birmingham formed a sports Hall of Fame. Many of you gentlemen are inducted in that Hall of Fame.

M You just happen to be talking to four of the board members. I've only been on it two years, but "Sos" and "Fudgie" each are chartered board members.

I Can you tell us about the formation of the Hall of Fame?

M We'll leave that to Fudgie.

S To start with, we sat right in here one day, sitting at the table.

I This is where the Hall of Fame idea started?

S Yes, right here, Joe and I were talking. He mentioned something about a banquet, a football banquet. He and I talked about it and we thought it was a good idea and so let's have a banquet, which went over real big. We had over 500 people at the banquet. So the people in the neighborhood like it. . . . . so, well, they asked John and all the guys, you ought to continue it, so that's when we made it the Hall of Fame. The first year we only put one man, he was the oldest man in the neighborhood who played football. Who was that? Steve Kinzer.

S So we decided to put people into the Hall of Fame. Besides Joe, now, there was this other fellow that was crippled and sick, Chick Vargo, another one of the organizers. So then as we went along and picked a couple more guys. And it was in the newspaper. And we added more then and then we got Mike two years ago. This is seven or eight years. We have 140 men and women in The Birmingham Hall of Fame right now. If you want to see the pictures, go down to St. Stephen's Hall. They got all the pictures on the walls, trophies and everything. So then every year, well it's been, we have never had below 500 (at this banquet).

I Thank you for this very interesting interview.

HOLY ROSARY CHURCH MEMORIES  
OF CHURCH COOKS

\*Lucy D'Emilio

\*Anna Ross

\*Betty Borics

The transcript which follows is an interview conducted by Carol Ann DuBrul on April 6, 1984.

I We are here with three women from Holy Rosary Church who have been cooking for church dinners, weddings and funerals for about 15 years. We'll be talking with Mrs. Lucy D'Emilio.

L I was born in Philadelphia, PA and I came to Toledo when I was two years old and I've been in this neighborhood ever since.

I What was the date of your birth?

L I was born September 12, 1914.

I Were your parents born in this country?

L My parents were born in Castro, Italy, and they came to America just before I was born, about two years before, because they came here right after their marriage.

A I'm Anna Ross and I was born in Castro, Italy. My parents were both born over there. We came to the United States in 1930. Our first address was in Pennsylvania. Sharpsville, PA. Six months later we moved to Toledo and we've been here ever since.

B And my name is Betty Borics, and I was born in Ironville, on Milard Avenue which is no longer there, but we moved to this Birmingham area when I was about 10, which is about 60 years ago. We've lived here ever since. All through my marriage and all.

I And how about your parents?

B My parents were born in Abasar, Hungary.

I How did you meet your husbands? And where were they born?

B Well, my husband, he came over with a boyfriend and he said, "I want you to meet a friend of mine." So he came over and my mother found out right away that he was Hungarian, which she was happy for, and that he was a Catholic, which she was happy for that, and I started to date him and we eventually got married and it'll be 50 years the 18th of April.

I Was he born in this country?

B No, he was born in Hungary and he came here when he was three years old.

I Anna how about you?

A I met my husband in 1938. He came to Toledo to work at the Interlake Iron. His stepfather had a job over there and he had just graduated from high school. He originally came from Pennsylvania. And he came to work over here and that's how I met him. And after the work was done he went back to Pennsylvania and we kinda corresponded and eventually it just led to our getting married.

I Lucy, was your husband born in this country?

L No, he wasn't, he was born in Italy, in Ceccano, Italy. He came to America when he was about 16 years old with his uncle. They lived in New York, and then West Virginia. I don't know how old he was when he came to Toledo. Anyway, I met him, oh, I don't remember. Oh yes I do. He was boarding with my mother. My mother had boarders and that's how I met him.

I Here in the Birmingham area?

L On Wheeling Street, just a couple of blocks away.

I Did your husband ever get involved in any of the church dinners?

A No, mine didn't. Well, mine didn't till these later years. Course he had to drive me all over since I don't drive, to pick up the things, the food and stuff like that. He chauffeured.

I How about you Lucy?

L My husband never partook in any of that. Because he always worked shift work and at that time, really, husbands weren't really involved in our dinners; like she says her husband in these later years took her but in earlier years us ladies that drove went and picked up stuff. Like Anna Perilli and I and whoever drove or Josephine Massa used to go. And we'd do our shopping like that so it was always the ladies' affair. The men were never involved.

I Anna, you said you were nine years old when you came to this country. Can you remember anything about your arrival, your trip here, how did you get to Birmingham?

A Well, that was some experience. We were, had to go to Naples after our passports were approved and different things and I remember going through customs over there and we had to go through a physical and, oh, what stands out in my mind is, I guess, they were trying to see how bright you were because they made you put some puzzles together. And we came by boat. It took about 10 days. I was very sick. That, especially, I remember and I guess we landed in New York and from there we went to Pennsylvania, where my uncle lived. I had an aunt and uncle over there. But then work was scarce so my dad had a relative in Toledo over here and they said that they were hiring over at the Interlake over there so we moved over here and it's where we've been ever since. Outside of five years after I was married I moved to Pennsylvania with my husband. That's where he had a job with Jones and Laughlin Co., there. Steel works, I would say.

I Betty and Lucy, did you attend Holy Rosary School?

B Yes.

L Yes.

A I did too.

I From what grade?

B Sixth, seventh and eighth grades; Lucy and I started from the first.

I Did you know each other when you were in Holy Rosary School?

A Oh yes, we were friends, and have been friends ever since.

I How long have the three of you known each other?

A Well, Lucy and I have known each other ever since 1931 and Betty and I got to know each other through the Rosary Altar Society.

B We've had a lot of functions and doings and we worked together making noodles and bake sales and card parties and all that.

I When and how did you three learn to cook?

B I learned to cook after I got married. I didn't really do too much cooking before.

I Your mother didn't insist that you learn to cook?

B No, my mother was a cook that liked to cook a big amount and it would last two or three days. When I got married my husband wanted me to cook every day. I managed, but it was hard, but I made it.

I What are your earliest memories of learning to cook?

A The first time I made noodles on my own, I mixed and rolled them out, we used to have those big long wooden rolling pins you know, you rolled them out on the table. Well I made my row to cut them but it wasn't dry enough and I went to take them apart and they were all stuck together again. One big noodle. So I had to make another big ball and start all over again. That was really something.

I That was when you were first married?

A That happened to me after I was married.

I What are your earliest memories of learning to cook?

L Oh dear, I don't know, I lived with my mother for the first four years. So she did the biggest part of the cooking. Then when I went on my own, I knew pretty well how to do it. My husband was a great helper and he helped me too. I think I learned later in life, I just can't think of the year, but the children were like four and six and I was on my own and I learned pretty well from my mother what I know now, but I've actually seen I've improved over the years.

I With age?

L Yea.

I Did all of your husbands think you were good cooks?

B Not when we got married. But it's okay now. Mine says, "Well, you don't hear me complaining." So I guess that's pretty good.

L My husband liked my cooking.

I What kind of dishes do you cook? Do you have a speciality? One that you're known for?

B Well, chicken paprika and also stuffed pig in the blanket. That's my two specialities. And also I bake certain things, you know, that he likes.

I Are they Hungarian?

B Yes.

I How about you, Anna.

A Well, we make a lot of noodles, ghochi and polenta. We must not forget polenta, my husband likes that. I love that.

I Tell us what polenta is.

A Well, that's mush. The way we make it is a little bit different. We don't make it with just water and corn meal. We cook potatoes and mash them up and then we add a little water, then corn meal and a little flour in it and cook for about a half hour... We spread it out on the board and we have a nice sauce made with spare ribs and sausage and mushrooms and lots of cheese. That makes it good.

I I'm getting hungry.

L I don't care for cheese that well. Being an Italian, that's terrible.

I What is your specialty?

L Well, I make noodles and I make gnocchi and I make lasagna and then for holidays I make Tortolini, which is a must every year. I usually make it for birthdays but since I've been sick I only make them for Easter and Christmas.

I Can you describe Tortolini for us? For Easter, since it's coming up.

L Well, yes, Tortolini is a noodle dough that is almost similar to your dough of spaghetti but I put just a wee bit of water in it to make it a little more tender and then I only roll one little piece at a time and then I cut this in little squares about an inch square. In the meantime, I have a filling of chicken, pork and mortadella.

I Which is a cheese?

L Mortadella is a ham. I put cheese, nutmeg, eggs, parsley, and a lot of nutmeg in it and salt and pepper and....

A Good cheese.

I Lucy doesn't like cheese!

L I'll eat it then. Anyhow I fix my meat first, you know my chicken and my pork and then I grind that and then I grind my mortadella and after all this is all ground, then I put my cheese and parsley and nutmeg.

I And that goes inside the?...

L Then I mix, I do it in the processor, but I used to do it by hand. It comes like a pate, you know. Then I take a little pinch and I put it on each little square and I turn it like that, I turn it on my finger and when I'm done it looks like a little crown. I could get you one from the freezer to show you. And then we cook this in rich chicken broth.

I Have you ever made this for a church supper?

L No, I never... too much work. Takes an awful lot of work.

A Takes forever to make those. Very tedious job.

I How did you become involved in the church dinners?

A Well, we were trying to raise a little money. I believe that's how we started.

L I think it started....no, the Italian, I'm going way back, way back, but I think the Slovaks, they had their paprikas dinners way back. Then our festivals always has that. And one day it was the feast of St. Ann and Father Palka was there and we were cooking spaghetti, but these were spaghetti in the box and they weren't noodles, and we cooked for a hundred people at that time and we only made a profit of maybe two hundred fifty dollars, but while we was fixing this he came down there and he says, "Why don't you form an organization?" So we formed an organization, The St. Ann Organization and from there we developed bigger and bigger dinners. Then they went into...the mothers' guild took over and they really had huge noodle dinners. They had noodle dinners. We had spaghetti dinners.

A They call it spaghetti but it's not spaghetti. My husband gets mad when he hears us say that, he says, "Those are not spaghetti. They are noodles."

B Homemade noodles.

A We spend three days making them. We made two hundred and fifty pounds of noodles for that last dinner we had. So I think that was our biggest dinner we had.

L Oh, yea, I think so, we served over a thousand dinners.

I How do you organize a dinner like that?

A Well, you get a committee. You have or ask some volunteers to come and help you make the noodles and you have a few in the kitchen and usually the chairman goes and does the buying and the ordering. You all get down to the hall and everybody does something. We all pitch in together.

L They usually know what they're assigned to, and they do it.

I This is for the benefit of Holy Rosary Church?

A Right. And school.

I And school?

A Right.

I Did you have children who attended Holy Rosary School?

B Yes, I had three children that attended Holy Rosary.

A All four of mine.

L And my two started from the first grade and graduated from there.

I Did you have an active mothers' club for Holy Rosary School right away?

B No, we only had, the last year my youngest daughter was in the eighth grade already when the mothers club started. But I was active in other activities like Campfire Girls, things like that. And I taught my girls how to set tables and they really did a lot of work, you know, helping out setting tables. Because, well, when we first had those dinners and we set everything at once, it was set for about three hundred people.

I So you organized some of the children from the school to help with the church?

B Yes, activities, right.

I Can you describe the first church dinners that you remember, even back in Italy? Do you remember having those kinds of events?

A I know in Italy they didn't. The first dinner, church dinners—that was over here in Holy Rosary. I was rather new and met Lucy and her sister.

L My sister, I wish she could have been here.

A They had started this. It's when I started joining in.

I Can you search your memory and think back to the very first church dinner that you helped with?

A That was a long time ago.

B The first one that I helped with was when we had a festival for three days and we had a fish dinner when we cooked about 100 or 125 pounds of fish.

I Do you remember what year that was? And what festival it was?

B No, I don't, I don't remember what year, but we used to bake pies the day before. And we really worked hard and we used to peel our own potatoes and make our own french fries and cut them and everything.

A And peel all the apples for the apple pie.

B Yes, really. Well that was already through the Rosary Altar Society. We had to raise money, I guess we were getting low in funds and we said, "We have to do something to help the church out."

I How important do you think these church dinners and school dinners were to maintain a sense of neighborhood and community here?

A Well, I think they're really important. It kind of brings the people all together and kind of makes it homey, you know, and it does help with the finances because right now we're really hurting.

L I think it brings, there are some people in our parish that we don't even know and through these dinners you begin to know them and you get better acquainted with them.

I How do you find out about the dinners, how do you go about getting helpers to join you?

A Well, they put it in the church bulletin. And sometimes they call by phone.

I Is one of you kind of the chairman of the group? Is there someone they call, one special person to join?

A I'm not on the telephone committee, are you?

B Yeah.

L And we call for the Altar Sodality and for Saint Ann. Doesn't do too much because we are only down to a few ladies, but you call these ladies they're pretty good, willing. They're all in there to do things.

I How much profit do you think the church sees from these dinners?

B Well, I think it varies to how much the meat costs, you know, sometimes the price of meat has gone up quite a bit, too. And everything we buy is good and fresh, like even our chicken dinners. We clean those chickens.

I About how many people attend these dinners? And are they usually just the people from the neighborhood and from the parish?

ALL Oh no, they come from all over.

L They advertise it on the radio, too.

A For the festival, especially. Well, now when they have these dinners they send out a flyer. For the festivals they have some little gift, you know, like a door prize. And they fill out a ticket, there's a little stub with the ticket, and they fill this out with their names and address and the last day of the festival the winner is pulled.

I What kinds of dishes besides the fish that you mentioned, what other kinds of dishes do you serve at these dinners-spaghetti?

A Then we have that chicken paprikas and pigs in the blanket.

B And chicken with dressing....

L They have those card parties; they have that Salisbury steak.

I What kind of ethnic backgrounds are represented in Holy Rosary Church? We have Italian and Hungarian here.

B Well, at the time it was really, when I first joined, it was known as the Slovak Church.

I And what year did you join the church?

B Well, it must of been around 1924. But then after that it seemed like more people moved in from all over.

L Our parish is really ethnic, it's really ethnic.

B All nationalities.

I Can you name some of them?

B And we do get along fine.

A Hungarian, Slovak, Bohemian, Mexican, German.

I Do all these ethnic backgrounds show up in the dinners?

ALL They do, yes, they work together.

B They cooperate and get along fine.

I How about the menus. Now you've mentioned paprikas, you've mentioned some Italian. Are there some Bohemian dishes? Are there some Mexican dinners?

A Yea, there is Mexican.

L This comes out in the festival. It doesn't come out yearly. In the festival, the Mexicans have a booth and everybody has a little something their way, or whatever they're going to cook. Like, ah, we have pizzas at the time and the Mexicans have tacos and burritos and different things like that.

I And the festival that you're talking about.....

L It's at our church.

A It's usually held the last weekend in June.

I When you are organizing these dinners, we talked about the shopping, etc., how do you go about purchasing the food and how do you prepare it? How do you organize a dinner for 200 people?

L Well, it took a lot of learning.

A Yea, that's right,

I Who taught you?

ALL Our mistakes, experience.

L Like, let's go to that first spaghetti dinner. Well, we bought a lot of spaghetti, and we make a lot of sauce. Sometimes, we ran out of spaghetti, we didn't make enough, either of -- or of sauce, or meat, or whatever. But now it seems like after every spaghetti dinner we have, we increase so that we don't run out and we always have enough. And we cook for 1000.

A This time we cooked for over 1000 including children, and we had enough sauce to go around.

L But we had to learn to get to that point.

I Can you estimate about how much?

A We had made 250 pounds of noodles but we did not cook all of those, we did sell some dry noodles, but I think we cooked at least 150 lbs. easy.

I When do you start making these noodles? And where do you make them?

A Down at the church hall. And we usually start about three weeks before the dinner. Each week we made 75 lbs. and then we leave those last two weeks before the dinner for the shopping and the making of the sauce and getting everything ready.

I And about how many ladies work on making these noodles?

L Oh, anywhere from 25, they all come to help and they all do a little something they can do. Someone's shaking them, someone's rolling, someone's putting them out to dry. You know there isn't only one that will do that. Maybe there's a half dozen taking them from the machine to dry. Then when the woman that cuts, she stands there and cuts and puts them in a tray and then maybe there's three or four of the ladies that will take these trays and go and put them out on the tables and she nests them like an angel. She nests all these noodles. Well, I used to grind, you know to push the noodle dough out; well now the last two times I missed, so I'm not going anymore.

I Is there a supervisor to this? Is there one woman who goes around....?

L&A Well, we have a chairman, but everyone is together.

I Does the chairman change from year to year?

L&A Well, yeah.

I How about the purchasing of the food. Do you have one person that goes out and buys?

A Usually the chairman will do that. Or if she needs a large quantity of something she will order it from the wholesale house. More like your lettuce for salad or your tomato paste or tomatoes for sauce. You do have to order your meat, you know, because we do work with about 195 lbs. of meat. So that's a lot of meat.

L Then somebody will pick up the meat and the sauce is delivered. The salad is delivered. And she works with her husband to pick up the flour to make the noodles and somebody picks up the eggs and it's really cooperation; otherwise you couldn't do it.

A And we do have a bunch of nice people. At Holy Rosary nobody grumbles about it.....

B They certainly enjoy it. When I took my granddaughter over there too, and she rolls, and she's twelve now.

A They love to help with about six or seven all together.

B She was there last year and I tell you, she works.

A It helps you know, those little young legs they carry those trays to whoever is spreading them on the tables and you'd be surprised. We get everybody.

B Well, they don't get tired as soon as we do. That's right. We even have men helping us. Yes, there's a couple of them that come to help us with the noodles.

A They mostly turn the machines, etc.

I What other things do the men do to help you in the dinners?

A Oh, well they've been very good in the kitchens. Now they have to handle all the pots and pans for us because we can't do that anymore. We used to, but now picking up a pan that holds 20 quarts of water with some noodles in it is a little bit much. So they do the heavy work.

L And they carry all cooked food to the table. Back and forth. Where we used to do that all ourselves in our young days.

I Are these the younger men?

L Yes, they're the younger fellows.

I Who would correspond to the ages of your children?

A Ummmm, well, yeah, I would say that, well mine are a little bit older now, but yes.

I What other fund raising activities for the church involve cooking and baking? Other than the dinners?

L Snack bar, card parties, pizza sales.

I What does that include?

L Cakes, sandwiches, pies, whatever. Or sometimes you can bake pizzas. At one time we were making pizzas for it. Now, right now, they have ham sandwiches, or chicken salad or barbecue beef; the girls are pretty good at putting this together.

I The same group of women?

A Well the same group, well it's mostly the same group. We keep getting younger ones all the time. Trying to break them in. Break them in gently. And we mustn't forget the mother and daughter breakfast we always have. That's on Mother's Day, too. Yeah, they have a lunch. We bake coffee cakes for that and the men will cook our eggs and bacon and that's one day we get served.

I On Mother's Day the men do the serving. Who does the cooking?

L The men do the cooking and then they get some of the older boys to come and help with the serving. Push the coffee pots around.

B It's a beautiful thing. It is real nice. We have about 250 people there. Mothers, daughters and grand-daughters, I know, I can still remember my mother when we first had the first one and we were involved and then our children were quite young then.

I Can you remember the year when it first began? The mother-daughter breakfast.

B Well, it was still in the old hall.

A It has to be at least 35 years ago. Back in the 40's.

I Any other events or activities that involve cooking for the church?

B Well, they bake bread and make noodles and have the card party and everybody bakes a cake or so and then what else do we have?

L Well, like St. Ann's sponsors a bake sale, bread sale, once a month but we haven't started this month yet. And we bake over 100 loaves of bread and we sell them.

I Do you sell that after Sunday Mass?

L Sometimes, but we usually sell it... if I put it in the bulletin and then you call me up and you order how many loaves. We take orders. I'd rather take orders so I don't have bread left over. And this is the way we do it because out of one sack we make maybe about, what, 20 loaves so I know how many we'll put out by the flour we mix.

I How about catering? Mrs. D'Emilio, you mentioned earlier that you catered weddings and funerals. Was this a private enterprise or was it done..?

L It was private. Like a friend would say, "Would you cook for my daughter's wedding?" or something or other like that. We did it sometimes like, say, she says free and sometimes we got paid. So, whatever, but it was fun doing that. But this is how we learned and I'll tell you, we got books from the library, my sister did, my sister's a great one, she's really the organizer of that. I wish she could have been here, and we'd read about how much meat to serve per person.

I Books on catering?

L Yeah.

I From the Birmingham branch?

L Well, I don't know where she got them, I'll tell you the truth, I don't know where, from the library, I know she got them from the library. It could be there. And, this is how we learned how much meat to serve per person, and then we'd build around that or sometimes we bought a little more so we wouldn't be stuck thinking, oh my, we didn't have enough food.

I Were they always ethnic weddings, ethnic meals?

L No, that one that we catered for Maulder, we had roast beef, sausage and we had macaroni salad or something, I don't remember.

I Were they usually neighborhood weddings?

L Well, this one was in Maumee, St. Joe's, that's, I think, the farthest I've ever went, otherwise, it's just around our church... No, I went to Mansfield, Ohio one time.

I How did that happen?

L Well, my friend wanted me to cater to her daughter's wedding, Angie Molnar. Her son, and he married somebody from Mansfield, so I had to prepare a lot of stuff at home and then I went, my sister-in-law lives in Mansfield, and I put it in her freezer till it was time to put it together at this hall. That's the furthest I've ever been.

I Betty and Anna, did you ever do any catering?

B No, I just helped.

I You helped Lucy?

B I helped her and I helped another lady that belongs to our parish and she catered a few Slovak weddings now and then.

A Oh, yeah, I helped her with two or three, four of them. I have helped people but I never catered.

I Are there any weddings that stand out in your memory that you helped cater or do the cooking?

B No, but I remember my sister's wedding as outstanding because she had twenty two bridesmaids which was really something and, of course, I was younger and it just seemed like it was so fabulous to me. Really big impression.

I Any weddings that stand out in your minds?

A Oh, my niece's wedding in Cleveland, we have a niece over there, and that was a truly Italian wedding, ah, with the food and the dancing and everything and the bride's father did the tarantella with his aunt and it was really a moving sight to see. They were so good together.

I Are the weddings here at Holy Rosary...are they typically ethnic? Are they typically Italian, typically Hungarian?

L I would say no, wouldn't you Betty?

B Yeah, if, whatever nationalities they are, I mean, most of the people who are going to be there are used to that food and that's what they usually prepare.

I What would you, if you were catering, when you were catering an Italian - since that's your ethnic background - an Italian wedding here in the neighborhood, at Holy Rosary, what would a typical menu be?

L Well, like we had endoritas, a spaghetti, and we had homemade noodles and they had their meatballs...they had meatballs and chicken, salad, and then they had a vegetable, like string beans and that would be it...and our bread.

I And, would you make those famous Italian cookies?

A Well, at that time, I think, these people they all bring different ones... would bring cookies or something.

I The family?

L The family would, because we never did that. We got the dinner, that was it, we never...although, Ida, my sister, would bake cakes for the wedding and she would do some of the baking. Whatever they asked, whenever she catered, I don't know how she did it. But she did that, she went into all that.

I What about funerals, funerals at Holy Rosary? Were you involved in any of the cooking? the meals?

B I helped serve and I helped cook, you know.

I Would that be in the church hall?

B Yes, in the church hall. Anybody that belongs to the parish can have the church hall for the funeral and I think that's very nice.

L Father lets them have it, gratis.

I Is there **one** funeral dinner that stands out in your memory as being especially notable, something that you worked on?

B Well, I can't really think of anything right now but if I think of it I'll let you know.

L Before they used to have noodles, like when my husband died, the ladies made homemade noodles, chicken and all that stuff, they really went all out, but now they're cutting it down to cold cuts and maybe, you know, potato salad and stuff like that because it's a lot of work.

B That's what I was going to say. Due to that we are getting older and it is so much harder to do, that's another thing...make it a little easier for ourselves.

I You don't see any younger women in the church, the St. Ann's group, or the young women's group that are learning...are taking over this?

L Well, the only one I know of is Betty the cook, she cooks at Holy Rosary School. And, then there's Janet Wlodarz, she caters, like I say, cold cuts and stuff like that for funerals; in fact, she did that for my brother-in-law a couple weeks ago. But, before, we used to have, like somebody died in the neighborhood, right away, they'd call. "Are you going to take it?" Usually she always headed it and I headed it and then we all helped. The girls were very, very good but we'd make noodles, we'd make sauce, we'd make meatballs, we make chicken, we make a big meal out of that; it was a lot. Now, I says, "I'm not catering anymore to stuff like that." So now, they're catering it only in lunch meats and what-have-you. And, its just as good, very, very nice. She had my brother-in-law, no not my brother-in-law, a friend of ours in the neighborhood and it went over very, very great. All the people coming with cakes and dessert and all she had to do was the lunch meats and the potato salad.

I So, the meals are plentiful but they are simple.

L Yes, you have a lot of food.

A That's a custom that comes from way back too, at funerals, for the Italian people, you sit home when someone dies and a friend, or family, or the neighbors will get together and they will bring food for the house and different things like that.

L Have you ever heard...well she probably knows about that.

I Will you translate that for us?

A Well, it's like she just said, it's consolation, it's a meal.

I Consolation.

L Yeah, it's a must, you know, with the Italian people, although, I'll tell you something, the younger generation don't believe in it, like my daughter, she doesn't believe in it.

I Did she tell you why?

L Yes, she says, "Mother, I don't know why they do that because after somebody dies you're not happy, you know, and, maybe, when there is a group you have to talk to 'so and so' and smile." And she said that you don't feel like it and she says it's not a party. So, I don't know, everybody had different ideas.

I What about the Hungarian people and their tradition? Is that a tradition with the Hungarians also?

B Yes, well they always serve lunch, hungarian cookies, and they have ham or hungarian sausage and maybe salad or some kind of potatoes. Well, they have coffee, and for the men they can have a little beer.

A We don't.

B But they do. Well, sometimes the family will have it if it's in the hall or someplace.

L Well, when my mother and dad died we had it at home. The people brought the food and this is how it originated. The people would bring the food at the house.

A Of course, we used to keep the body at the house.

L They'd bring all the food for all the family and the relatives over there. They would bring wine or beer or whatever. That's for home, but when we have it in public like this, we only have coffee.

I Do you have any really special fond memories of cooking for the church that you'd like to share with us? That you haven't talked about so far?

L Well, I have a fond memory. At this particular time her and I had to cook for a liturgical committee. And the Bishop was there. Bishop Hoffman. And we prepared homemade noodles and meatballs and then I made chicken with wine and I forgot what you call that. And, we had a salad and then, it was an authentic Italian meal, and then we had cheese and fruit. Well, after the meal, Father Leyland says, "We have to thank the cooks." So, I told Father Leyland, "I'd love to meet Bishop Hoffman." So, well, he called us out to thank us and then he says, "Lucy D'Emilio would like to meet the Bishop." And, here comes the Bishop from out of the audience and he comes up to me and he hugs and he kisses me and oh, I was thrilled to death. So, I told him, I says, "She helped me" and he goes over there and he kisses her too. And, so to me that was....

A That really was nice, that was special.

I And, that was relatively recently.

L About three, four years ago, I think.

A Something like that. He's a nice man.

L And, I even made noodles for Bishop Donovan. How about that.

I Special order?

L Special order.

I How often?

L Well, I just got through making her six pounds about couple months ago.

I OK, you had a special order of home made noodles for the retired Bishop of Toledo?

L That's right. I've had that for a long, long time. At one time this housekeeper called Father Blasko, if they knew of anybody that knew how to make noodles. I even exchanged recipes with this Mary, his house-keeper, but, she's married now, I can't think her last name, and Father says "Well Lucy makes noodles;" so, he called me if I would do that but he wants his noodles with all yolks, he wants a lot of yellow, and I been making them ever since. A lot of cholesterol.

I How about you Betty, do you have one fond memory of cooking for the church, one special time that is in your memory?

B I don't know, I think probably maybe the last time I cooked because I can no longer go anymore.

I You don't...your health?

B Yeah, my health don't allow me to do it 'cause I can only work about two hours and then I have to stop; so, I mean, its hard to go there because when you're once there and you're working in a group, you do not want to stop, you want to stay there till the end. That's true.

I Well, what has your involvement in the church cooking meant to you? I get the feeling that it's meant a lot to you?

B It's very important to me; I love the church and I've practically done everything in the church. I was sacristan, I worked with the liturgical committee, I can't tell you when I was in the parish council, I was practically in everything that they ever had, that I could do, like I helped with the noodles, the cooking, baking and that. I just helped everywhere and then I had my campfire girls and I just did everything that...and I enjoyed every minute of it.

A It is, it's very rewarding. And, it's nice to be with ladies and there's a closeness and it's nice.

B And, you exchange recipes, different ones.

I So, it's been a real important part of your life to be involved.

L I'd rather be over there a lot of times 'cause I live alone. And, I'd rather be there with a bunch. I feel bad now that I don't go, but they ask me to go even if I don't do anything. Maybe, I can do a little something, so, maybe I will go this next time. Just to be amongst the ladies. Sure, that would be nice. Even if I have to nest because that ain't too, too hard.

A That's good.

L Because that ain't too, too hard to nest the noodles. Maybe I can do some of that. And when I get tired I'll sit down.

I Now that you are all in semi-retirement from the church cooking, are you training any people to take your place? And if so, is there a training program? Are you doing it in an organized way?

A Well, not so much in an organized way, but we are showing some of the younger ladies how to knead and how to start their sauce and different things like that.

L We haven't got down to mixing the dough. We haven't got down to teaching them how to mix the dough. But my nephew is selling a huge commercial processor and I was telling them at the church that they should get that because the younger people could mix their own dough and they could go on with it. But, I don't know, they haven't bit yet if they are going to buy because there was only Anna Ross, Anna Perfili, Aldo and Josephine and I mixing. Now I can't mix. Now this girl Anna she would go over there early and mix like 7:00 in the morning. By the time you would get there she would have 25 pounds mixed. Now you know that you're not going to be able to do this anymore. No, I'd just tell them (Altar Sodality), that they should do something. I even told Sister if she would send some of them grade school children down and leave 5 pounds of flour and I would give each a pound of flour and four or five eggs and show them. I've even offered to go over there to show them how to do that. I didn't get no response so...I don't think that they want to learn.

B They're not interested.

L Oh yes, there was some that came down there, they were really interested. Oh. But it didn't get down to the nitty-gritty. You can try again. Maybe try again.

A Well, I think you have to get the young ladies from the school guild. Yea, those are the ones who will really have to learn.

L Well, they got a lot of babies and they don't have time.

B And a lot of them have other jobs.

L It's hard, it's very hard right now because the children, the ladies of our parish, most of them work or have some other commitment. So I don't know.

I Do your children live in the area?

B Well my daughter does, my grandson does, but my other two don't. They live in Texas.

A Well, I've got three of them that live in town, and one out of town.

I Do your children who live in the area help participate in this church cooking?

A Oh, yes, they're a help.

I So they are very active in the church group also?

A I've just got Cindy because the other one belongs to Blessed Sacrament, so they are over there. Yea.

L And both of mine live in Oregon so they don't do nothing for Holy Rosary. Oh, my son sells tickets.

I He comes back to this neighborhood?

L He helps Father with these tickets. He sells a hundred and twenty-four books, a hundred and twenty dollars worth every month.

B That's a good help.

L And Mary, she belongs to St. Ignatius, so she don't come here.

I What do you see as the future of the cooking in the Holy Rosary Church?

B Well, I do think a few of the younger women are coming in through the school guild. And I think, if, you know, if we have patience maybe to work with them and kind of show them, I think they will come around.

A They do a tremendous amount of work-the school guild. We have to give them a lot of credit. They raise a lot of funds. They're always involved with something or other going-a very active group. Yes, I don't know where they get the energy from. They deserve a lot of credit.

L They're a willing group. But before they get it down, our spaghetti dinner, it's going to be a long time, I can see that. I don't know, I'm more skeptical than her, but I really...it's a lot of dinners are very, very, complicated. She told you there's three weeks in advance we make noodles. The fourth week is when we put it together. One day we go out and make meat sauce. I'm saying we. Well, then we make plain sauce to mix your spaghetti. The third day we make bread. The fourth day we put it together. So you can imagine how many of the same...how many days the same women are working.

I It takes over a full week before the end?

L Yes, yes. And these other little girls, God bless them, they're really wonderful. They're setting tables, organizing for that, or they're buying this or they're doing silver, they're doing the head list, checking the lettuce and all that. Who's making the dressing? There is a lot of work that they help but at one time we did it all ourselves for those dinners. Our dinners, our dinners weren't very large. No, our dinners, like I told you, they weren't very large. But we took care of everything. We made our own dressing, we chipped our own lettuce, we cut our own bread, we set the table, we wrapped the silver.

L Everything went through St. Ann's Sodality for these dinners. Now it is a bigger project. And these girls do a wonderful job, but they haven't got down to the "nitty gritty" about the sauce and the noodles.

I Well thank you ladies very much, for sharing your memories.

ALL It was a pleasure.

MEMORIES OF  
BLACK RESIDENTS  
OF BIRMINGHAM

\*Mrs. Georgie Craver Martin

\*Mrs. Margaret Toadvin

\*Mrs. Ethel Larkin

The transcript which follows is from an interview conducted by Carol Ann DuBrul on April 27, 1984.

I Today is Friday, April 27, 1984. This is an interview for the Birmingham Cultural Center. The interviewer is Carol Ann DuBrul. We are seated in the Woodford Street home of Mrs. Grady H. Martin, widow of the first pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church. The women who will be sharing their memories of the Black ethnic influence in the Birmingham neighborhood are: Mrs. Grady H. Martin. When were you born, Mrs. Martin?

M 1909.

I Where were you born?

M In Georgia.

I What was your maiden name, Mrs. Martin?

M Craver. Georgie Craver. That's an Irish name. (laughter)

I And where were your parents born?

M In Georgia. They were both born in Georgia.

T My name is Margaret Toadvin. I reside at 318 Ira Road. My maiden name was Margaret Gullatt. I was born in Texarkana, Texas, March 16, 1937.

I And where were your parents born?

T My father was born in Texarkana, Texas, and my mother was born in Shreveport, Louisiana.

L I'm Ethel Larkin. I live at 2331 Woodford Street. My husband was Walter Larkin. I'm widowed. I was born May 2, 1925 in Mississippi.

I And where were your parents born?

L They were born in Mississippi also.

I How long have you three ladies lived in Birmingham? When did you come to Birmingham, Mrs. Martin?

M I came to Birmingham in 1930.

I How about you, Mrs. Toadvin?

T I came to the Birmingham area when I was ten years old. I started school at Birmingham. I have lived here approximately 35 years, off and on.

L I moved to the Birmingham area in 1954.

I Why did you come to Toledo, Mrs. Martin?

M I had a sister living here and I came to visit with her. I was here and I got married. (laughter)

I How about you, Mrs. Toadvin?

T Well, I came with my parents. My mother and I had made a visit here. We moved here from California. We had made a visit here and my mother liked it real well and she had two sisters here. And they said, "Why don't you bring your children here?" And that's how I came to the Birmingham area.

I Ok.

L I came to Toledo in 1942 with my parents. My father was looking for a better job and that is why he moved here.

I Did you locate in Birmingham right away?

L No, no I didn't. I was married (when I moved to Birmingham). When I married my husband he was living herein the Birmingham area so that is why I moved here.

I And you moved from the City of Toledo?

L Yes.

I How about you, Mrs. Toadvine, did your family move here to Birmingham?

T When we originally came, we lived with my mother's sister for about, oh, I would say three months.

I And where was that?

T That was over on Ewing Street--624 Ewing Street. There were seven of us. And that's kind of hectic to have that many children in one house and especially when it's not your own. My father purchased the property out on Consaul, oh, about three months after we moved here from California.

I Can you tell us a little about your family's location here in Birmingham?

T Well, my initial reaction when we came was being from California--I told my mother, I said, "The sun's not shining." I had gotten used to sunshine. The day we came it was a very dreary day. And I was even more depressed when they brought me out to show the area (Note: The Ira Street area) that they had picked because at this time this area was undeveloped. Completely. And I said, "Mother, why would you bring us?"

I What did it look like? Can you describe this? What year was this?

T I believe, let's see, I was ten years old so this must have been somewhere around 1947...1950 somewhere around there. And it was more or less marshy. Very undeveloped. There were no streets. It was, well, country. The streets were undeveloped. There were a lot of trees, and we purchased the property from a Mrs. Essie Robinson who owned all of this property at that particular time. And during our tenure there my father purchased other property in this location and over the years it has become developed.

I How many members of your family now live in the Birmingham area, in or on the plot of land which your father had added to over the years?

T There are six of us in the immediate family, that's my mother, and my father of course, he's deceased now, my two sisters, myself, my daughter and my brother.

I Six homes on the one street that belong to your family?

T That's correct.

I Mrs. Martin, did you locate in the Birmingham area right away?

M Yes, I did. And you want me to tell you something about my parents? My father was a minister, and he was in business. He was a stockholder in the Consolidated Union Investment Company in Georgia. And he was the secretary of this company, and all the lodges, there were 84, and these lodges contained about three to four hundred members each. And they all sent their money to my father and he would report to the company. They were in the undertaking business and they could bury anybody in the State of Georgia, anywhere.

I When you moved up here to Birmingham, you said you moved up and lived with a relative a while.

M My sister.

I And then you met your husband, who was a minister.

M No, he wasn't a minister at that time, but he went into the ministry after that. After we got married.

I When you married did you move to this home in Birmingham?

M No, no, no we didn't. We didn't right away.

I Where did you live.

M We lived over on Genesee Street.

I In the Birmingham area?

M Yes.

I Were there many Black people in Birmingham when you came here in the 1930's?

M Yes, quite a few.

I Did they live scattered in the whole Birmingham area?

M Yes; Woodford, Genesee, Bakewell -- all around.

I What is your earliest memory of moving to Birmingham? What do you remember about Birmingham when you moved here as a young bride?

M Well, it was built up just like it is now.

I Were there a lot of businesses?

M Yes, there was. We had more business then than we have now. We had a nice bakery, we had a service post office, we had a dry goods store -- we had two dry goods stores, and we had a jewelry store and a tailor shop and a furniture store (which we still have).

I Were there a lot of Black people employed in these small businesses in Birmingham?

M I don't know if there were so many employees or not, but there was a lot of business around.

I What is your earliest memory, Mrs. Larkin, of moving to Birmingham?

L Well, when I was married to my husband in '54 and we moved to Ira Road, we lived there about a year. Then we moved here on Woodford Street, where we live now.

I Did your husband work in the neighborhood?

L Yes, he worked at Interlake Iron on Front Street.

I Did you feel welcomed when you moved to Birmingham? Let's start with Mrs. Martin, since you came here earliest in the '30s.

M Yes, I felt welcomed.

I Why did you feel welcomed; what were some of the things that happen to you to make you feel welcome in Birmingham?

M Well, I don't know, just everybody treated me all right, made feel welcomed.

I Mrs. Toadvin, as a young child you entered the Birmingham School. You said you were ten years old; did you feel welcome in Birmingham?

T Initially, yes I did. And I think that I felt that way because as you stated earlier, it is an ethnic neighborhood. And we tend to feel comfortable around familiar surroundings. By saying that, I do not mean that I did not encounter any cases of prejudice because I have, but they were minor. But I did feel welcomed.

I What about you, Mrs. Larkin? You came to Birmingham as a young married woman.

L Yes, and I think that's one of the reasons why I was happier. When we moved I was just married, and I guess I wasn't thinking about much more. (laughter) I joined Zion Hill Baptist Church after a few years and they were all friendly and nice people. I was just happy. I never thought of being unhappy here.

I Now we're really trying to emphasize the Black influence in ethnic background in Birmingham. Are there any family traditions that you and your family uphold that you consider ethnically Black traditions?

L Well, at New Year's we always have black eyed peas (we still do that) and ham hocks. My dad always had that, then he tells us that if we ate these we would always have money all the year. (laughter) It would bring me good luck, but I don't think that happened but we did and still do.

I Mrs. Martin, are there any traditions that you have brought from Georgia that you have continued?

M No, no.

I No special one. How about you Mrs. Toadvin?

T Well, I listened to Mrs. Larkin. We more or less celebrate New Year's in the same way. I think that is a tradition of Black people. During the Christmas holidays, we do assemble. Our family assembles at my mother's every Christmas. We take our gifts and we open them there and we have Christmas breakfast there. That is a tradition with our family. Our family reunions -- we used to have them annually -- I know that is not a tradition with a lot of families, but we look forward to it and we encourage our youngsters to go, and our children.

I Are there any special ethnic foods that you prepare?

T Yes, I do.

I Besides the black eyed peas and ham hocks?

T The black eyed peas and corn bread, of course. During the winter season I would say, Mrs. Martin, wouldn't you, chitlins, cole slaw -- maybe that's not traditionally Black, but we have the chitlins during Christmas and New Year's.

M Oysters, that is what my father would like. He would like turkey and dressing and oysters. My father would like oysters.

I Another season has certain traditions?

M Yes, we have that turkey and dressing you know. (laughter) Sweet potato-pies, of course.

L We never want to forget our sweet potato pies.

T And our turnip greens.

M We always would have turkey and dressing.

I Are you teaching your children these ethnic recipes?

T Oh, yes, my daughters, my one daughter is 25 and I have taught her to make these ethnic dishes along with my younger daughter, Andrea, who is 17. In fact, Birmingham School had an ethnic menu put out and I think we furnished the recipe for black eye peas and ham hocks. And I still have it at my home now.

I Are there any other ethnic cultural things, for instance, crafts, or art or music that are considered ethnically Black in origin that are handed down in the family or in the neighborhood? What about music or art?

T That would be traditionally Black? The only thing that I can say is that my mother gave us music lessons whether we wanted them or not. You had to take piano lessons and I learned how to play the piano. Not very well, but I also insisted that my children learn to play the piano. They took lessons, but anything that you insist that they do sometimes they do not do very well. (laughter) But we do play the piano. We have piano lessons and my daughter plays in the band up at Waite High School. She plays the saxophone in the band. And getting back to my brother, he was the first Black ever to play at Waite High School in the band. He played alto-sax.

I Since you came here really, Mrs. Martin, with the establishment of Zion Baptist Church...that was established in 1932?

M Oh no, you have the history of that. It wasn't '32. It is on the history we gave you.

I About how many members were in the membership when it started?

M Oh, it wasn't very many. I guess about 30, when it started.

I About how many people do you have in the membership today?

L Right now, I believe its over 100.

I Do all the members live in the Birmingham area?

L No, some have lived here at one time and moved away, but they still hold their membership here.

I Are there other ethnic groups other than Blacks who are members of the Zion Hill Baptist Church.

L No, just Black.

I Does Zion Church ever combine with the other Birmingham churches, for instance, St. Michael's Byzantine Church or St. Stephen's Hungarian Catholic Church or Calvin United Hungarian Church? For special religious or social events?

L Last year we went to church right here and I can't think of the name of it. Right here on Caldonia. They also feel a fellowship with us. It's a Baptist church.

I Mrs. Martin, in what church were you married here in Toledo?

M I was married in the Warren A.M.E. church.

I That's the first Black church established in Toledo. Are all three of you ladies members of the Zion Hill Baptist Church here?

T No.

L I am.

I Mrs. Larkin and Mrs. Martin are. And Mrs. Toadvin, you're...

T I am a member of Inspirational Baptist Church and it's located at 763 Vance Street in Toledo. But I have attended Zion Hill Baptist Church . . . on special occasions.

L She was our Women's Day speaker last year. She did a beautiful job too.

I What about the Birmingham Ethnic Festival, the yearly festival? Does Zion Church or the Black population of Birmingham in general have any input in the festival?

L No, We always had a big day on that same day up until last year. Our homecoming day was the same day as the festival. When they found out that we couldn't participate because of this, they changed theirs to the next Sunday, and we also had changed ours, to the next Sunday to miss that and so it was last year that they had theirs on a different day. That is why. So maybe now we might be able to participate.

I You have been invited?

L Yes, we have.

I Do a lot of the Black population in Birmingham attend the festival?

L I really don't know because I don't. But my children always go in the evening when we get out of church; they always go. I don't know how many participate.

I Are there any ethnically Black organizations in Birmingham? Either social or political organizations such as the NAACP?

L Our pastor's wife, she takes the membership for the NAACP but we don't have a chapter here on the East Side. Mrs. Wiggins, our pastor's wife.

I Are there any other social organizations, Black organizations, social or political organizations here in Birmingham?

T None within my knowledge. I belong to several groups but they are not Birmingham oriented.

I Greater Toledo?

T Greater Toledo area. It encompasses the greater Toledo area.

I Mrs. Martin, can you think of any organizations?

M No, I don't. But one thing that I do remember, Mr. Martini, he was the principal of Birmingham school, and I wanted him to teach me to speak Hungarian. He refused to teach me. He said it was a dead language. He wouldn't teach it to me. (laughter)

I You asked the principal of Birmingham School? Was he Hungarian background?

M Yes, he was. (laughter)

I Do any of you three ladies belong to any Birmingham groups, such as the Friends of the Library?

M No.

T No.

L I do not.

I Well, Mrs. Martin mentioned the principal, one of the principals of Birmingham school, and that takes us to the topic of education. Would you share with us your level of education, where you were educated--all three of you came to Birmingham at a different time--and the education of your parents . . . Mrs. Martin?

M Morehouse College in Georgia.

I You went to school in Georgia. How about your parents?

M My parents? I don't know where my parents were educated, but my father was educated because he was in business.

I He was a minister also?

M Yes.

I Mrs. Toadvin?

T I graduated from Waite High School in '56. My father had a fourth grade education, but where we live now he built the homes of the six of the family members that are there. My mother completed the 8th grade. My children also graduated from Birmingham and my daughter graduated from Waite. And I'll have a daughter coming out of school this year. She's already enrolled at The University of Toledo for the September classes.

I Mrs. Larkin.

L I graduated from Scott High School and my children all went to Birmingham school. My father and mother, they both went to about the 5th grade, I believe, something like that...in Mississippi. I had one son graduate from Toledo University and he lives in Chicago. He's a news reporter. And one other son attended college in Ann Arbor, Michigan, but he didn't graduate.

I What about extra-curricular activities? What about the sports and the clubs outside of school? Mrs. Toadvin, you were in school from age 10, did you or your children participate in those things?

T Yes, I participated. My daughter, Andrea, is 17. She plays in the band. She was the Black History Queen. My oldest daughter was also elected the Black History Queen when she attended Waite High School. Andrea attended the Ethnic Heritage class at the Paine Library. She's very active in school. Some of the activities escape me right now, but she is very active in the band.

I Mrs. Larkin, were your children active in Birmingham extra-curricular activities?

L Well, I had one daughter sing in the choir, for about 3 years, I believe. And two of my sons played on the football team. That's what they liked.

I Do you think that this education in Birmingham had an effect on either yourself as a student or your children as students? On your ethnic background? Any way, pro or con?

L I think it was helpful attending school in an ethnic neighborhood. I think you come out, you tend to fear things that you do not understand. You could communicate perhaps more with the people of your own ethnic background. Then you had the opportunity to learn more about the other nationalities and minorities that live within the neighborhood. So it was.

I Mrs. Martin didn't get to have her wish to learn Hungarian. (laughter) Did either of you two ladies or your children learn some of the other languages that are prevalent here in Birmingham?

L No, mine didn't. (laughter)

T My daughter takes Spanish at school. But other than that I do not know.

I No Hungarian?

T No Hungarian, sorry. I did attend the Hungarian sewing classes over at the Eastside Family Center on Varland Avenue.

I Let's review the founding of Zion Baptist Church. You have graciously let us have the history of the church to print up, but can you tell us anything about the founding of the Zion Hill Baptist Church? How did your husband become the first pastor?

M Well, he organized the church. I don't remember the year it was. It says when on the history.

I It says February 17, 1932.

M Well, that's when it was, then. But it wasn't in Birmingham. It was...well you have it down in the history. I don't know what you call it...on Little Hill.

I So it did take until 1940.....

M Yes, that's when we came over here and bought this building over here on Woodford St. and moved in.

I In 1945 members voted to use the original name, Zion Hill Baptist Church?

M Yes, that's right. That's when they found another church was named Zion Hill and then we changed our name to Little Hill. And then after this church went down then we voted to have the original name down here.

I To the other name, the original?

M The original name.

I Are you affiliated, is Zion Hill Baptist Church affiliated with any other church in Toledo?

M Yes, Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church.

I We'd like to talk a little bit about politics in the Birmingham area. Now we know that in the 1960's, that was a time of racial unrest. What was the reaction of Birmingham's Black population to the racial riots in downtown Toledo in the late 1960's?

L I could only speak for my family. We were very uneasy. What we did was stay home. I kept my children at home, because we were just afraid. Most of my children were at home then.

I What about the appearance of the Black Panthers in Toledo in the late 60's? Was there a reaction here in the Birmingham Black population to that? Mrs. Martin, did you feel any kind of reaction to those racial riots?

M No, no I didn't.

I Was it talked about in the church?

M They always speak about whatever is happening in the community. I'm sure they said something of it.

I Mrs. Toadvin, do you have any memories of those years?

T I recall vaguely hearing my parents talk about it. But, I guess my parents were more or less like Mrs. Larkin, not being oriented into things like this. They kept us at home. They would more or less tell us not to become involved.

I Did you see any involvement or any activity in Birmingham, or would you say that the majority of the Black population of Birmingham did as your family did, and stayed home, and were a bit afraid of what was going on downtown?

L I think that was the way it was. So far as I know...they never came onto the east side. We never heard of them being on this side of town.

T At that time it was not popular to become involved in race matters, at that time. And our parents were from the older school and an older generation, and of course, now I don't know if their attitude would be one of complacency, because I think that's what happened during the interim that this was going on. And, when something has the tendency not to reach you or your particular community, you have a tendency to ignore it or pretend it doesn't exist, and I think this is more or less what happened during that interim.

I What was the reaction of the Black population to the Consaul Street Bridge controversy when they were talking about putting an overpass bridge?

T I can just say what happened in my particular family. We live out Consaul past the railroad tracks and where the bridge was going over, and I can recall saying to my parents, "Why don't you go down to Council and get involved, because we need that because I have to go to work every morning and I'm late, with the trains." And, my mother, I recall her saying that the Birmingham residents are very upset about it, they don't want that. I says, "I know, but it's something that is needed, as far as getting to work on time." But, that's all that I can recall that happened in my home during that time.

I Mrs. Larkin?

L Yes, a few times they would come around with the papers that we should sign and....it was quite a few people that did want it, the overpass. One reason, when we first got married and lived out there, it was because of the children having to cross...and it was so dangerous. ...That's why we wanted it so bad.

I So, the black population of Birmingham did become involved in that neighborhood controversy?

L Yes.

T Yes.

I What about the possible closing of the Birmingham Branch Library?

T I thought that would be a great loss to the community. I think that the east side needs a library, and not only that, it's convenient, and it's in walking distance.

I You became very involved with this?

T Yes.

I Mrs. Martin, did they speak of that problem in the church?

M No, they didn't, but we think it is very important to have it, because I used to go there and get different books, you know, and read, and I think it is very important, I think we need a library here.

L I did attend the Birmingham Coalition when they were trying to get that and they were really strongly against having that closed. I think that one of the reasons that helped to keep it opened was the Coalition.

I In closing, if you could think of one special way in which you think the Black population in Birmingham had added to the diverse ethnic mix that you find in this neighborhood, what would that one special thing be?

T Well, perhaps, understanding. As I have said before, I think you have a tendency to fear things that you do not know about and I think education is the key. When we know more about each other, we will understand each other more, and being, living in an ethnic neighborhood has taught me, along with other things, that respect and understanding are some of the things that come out of an ethnic neighborhood. I think the little lady who does the commercial --"Where's the Beef?" -- and we're living in a popular time now, you always think, "Where's the Black?", or "Where's the minority?", and I think this has brought about an understanding of the different ethnic groups, and along with understanding comes respect.

M And, love.

I Well, thank you ladies very much.

T Thank you for asking.

ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH AND  
THE PRESERVATION OF ETHNICITY

\* J. Oscar Kinsey  
\* Rev. Martin Hernady  
\* Peter Ujvagi

The transcript which follows is an interview conducted by Carol Ann DuBrul on May 18, 1984.

Today is May 18, 1984. This is a video oral history for the Birmingham Ethnic Cultural Center. The interviewer is Carol Ann DuBrul. We are here with three gentlemen who will be sharing their memories of the Birmingham neighborhood as it relates to St. Stephen's Catholic Church and School. Our interviewees are:

O: J. Oscar Kinsey born in Lorain, Ohio in 1913. My father and mother both came from Hungary. I have been a resident of the Birmingham area since 1918.

M: I am Martin Hernady. I was born in 1924, February 3, in Hungary. And after finishing my studies in Rome I came to the United States in 1950. I have been in Birmingham since 1954 serving at St. Stephen's Church.

P: My name is Peter Ujvagi. I have lived in the Birmingham neighborhood since June 4, 1957 and was born in Budapest, Hungary on March 31, 1949. I came to Toledo after the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Both of my parents were also born in Hungary.

I: When did the first Roman Catholic Hungarians come to Birmingham?

M: We are trying to really get back to the date. Our presumption is that it was the last decade of the last century, 1895. There was a very zealous Hungarian Catholic priest in Cleveland. He came over and started to organize a new Hungarian community-Hungarian Catholic parish. And the first Mass was said in 1898 and the congregation had chosen the name of St. Stephen. Ever since 1898 we have had a Catholic parish in Birmingham.

I: What brought these Hungarian people to the Birmingham area?

P: Well, from the very beginning, a lot of Hungarians have lived in the Birmingham neighborhood. They first came when several steel mills and foundaries came to locate on the riverfront along the Maumee River. Many of them at that point came from Lorain and Cleveland area. Others began to immigrate from villages back in Hungary directly to the Birmingham neighborhood. But the first workers who came to this area, to great extent, came because of the steel mills. There were also a fair number of Hungarians who came to work on the railroads and on the railroad construction in Northwestern Ohio and then ultimately settled into the Birmingham neighborhood.

I: Was there a Roman Catholic church here at that time?

M: I don't think so. Our people went for services to Sacred Heart Church, which is almost a 100 years old at this time. You can find Hungarian names in their records before 1898.

I: Then St. Stephen's Church was founded in the late 1890's.

M: The very end of the last century.

I: Is the original church building still in existence?

M: Well, that's the story of Catholic churches in America. The first is always burned down and then they build the next one.

I: So the first one was built of wood?

M: Wood, of course. A frame church. And the new church was built in 1914, which is a beautiful Romanesque-style church.

I: Was a school built along with the church, originally? Did they build a school?

M: Well, they had school all the time ever since the parish existed. At the very beginning you know they had many, many children and they had all kinds of extra classrooms-storefronts, and moveable classrooms. And then they had the big frame school. Then in 1924 they built the first part of the present school structure which is a very solid, good building and even in my time we had the old building behind this new building. And then in 1958 we finished the building project of the school. We have a beautiful regulation size gymnasium and all the different rooms that the school needs.

I: What do you see as the role of St. Stephen's School in preserving and maintaining the ethnic community of Birmingham?

P: Well, we very firmly believe, and I very firmly believe, that the role of the school where the parish is number one, is very important, whether it's St. Stephen's or any other church, because the church is very much part of the community and the school is there to serve the parish members and the community as well. It is an opportunity for young children to become acclimated to the parish and the neighborhood, to be able to have traditions and culture passed down from generation to generation. So the role of the parish school is a very, very important one and St. Stephen's over many years has continued to maintain a strong school. And we see now as the parish is becoming older in terms of its major membership that the church continues to maintain its school and is reaching out so that we have both parish members attending that school as well as a significant number of children from the neighborhood who are not necessarily parish members nor necessarily Catholic.

O: An afterthought: when I started school in 1921 they had not only English-speaking teachers but Hungarian nuns because when I started going to St. Stephen's School I couldn't speak a word in English. All the language at home was in Hungarian. So we had to have a Hungarian nun to translate to English for me. That's the way it started.

I: When the diocese of Toledo was established in April 1910, did that affect St. Stephen's Hungarian Church in any special way?

M: Not at all.

I: It was originally part of the diocese of Cleveland?

M: Right. Then the one section of the diocese of Cleveland became the diocese of Toledo. And my understanding is Bishop Schrembs, who was the first Bishop of Toledo, really loved St. Stephen's parish. He was a steady guest because we had a very good housekeeper who was also a very good cook.

P: And that tradition has been maintained over the years as you well know. The one very important thing is that St. Stephen's has been a nationality parish. And there is a distinction in the Catholic Church, or has been in the past, between territorial parishes and nationality parishes that were originally established to help immigrants who came to this country to learn English and to become Americans and, in theory, those parishes were going to sort of go away when we all became whatever was meant by Americans, in the late part of last century, part of this century. Yet, in many dioceses around the country nationality parishes are often the strongest parishes left in the church and St. Stephen's continues to be an ethnic parish. It has an ethnic identity and we have members coming from throughout the city to continue to participate in the parish life.

I: In the church history they note that March 15, 1942 was proclaimed Hungarian Day by Ohio's governor and also by the mayor of Toledo. Can you describe this celebration in 1942? Can you remember it?

O: It's been so long ago but I know it was quite a celebration and dinners all over. It was quite a celebration. We had chicken paprikas, Hungarian sausage, Hungarian soup, chicken noodle soup, I remember that much about it; but it's been so long ago, I just can't recall.

I: So St. Stephen's does not celebrate March 15, Hungarian Day?

M: That used to be a national holiday in Hungary and that was the day of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. Ever since, they have had so many other

kinds of revolutions so the old one's fading away, so to say. But I think, as Peter mentioned, the role of the ethnic parish is to adjust the people to the local customs and local traditions so we keep our Hungarian religious traditions but we don't necessarily go into the political part of the Hungarian life. We firmly believe we are Americans. We celebrate the American national holidays. Of course, we remember the Hungarian holidays too, somehow, but I think that's not the role of the church.

P: For instance, there is a March 15 celebration, at least since I've been here, on a regular basis at the Hungarian Club of Toledo. It's a very small one and people from the community who wish to participate do so in that there is a flag that flies down at the International Park that was sponsored by the Hungarian community and that was in many respects a commemoration of Hungarian independence and, as Father says, Hungarians have struggled for their independence many times so that March 15 is just one of many celebrations I think we remember.

O: When they would have the celebration on March 15—that's one time all three churches, Calvin United Church, St. Michael's Catholic Byzantine Rites, and St. Stephen's would get together and combine their efforts to make this affair a big one on March 15.

I: Do you today get together with those two other ethnic churches and celebrate?

P: Certainly.

M: Certainly.

I: What kinds of events?

M: Well, we have cultural events, Hungarian nights, but we always try not to keep a political tone. There's a nice Hungarian Club in the neighborhood which is a civil club and I think that's the role of the civil association. I, as a pastor, would not commit myself to a political direction. Even among the Hungarians, you know, they may be split between the Republicans and Democrats (perhaps more Democrats); but in the old country they had sometimes 10 different factions in the parliament so it was very difficult to take sides.

I: As Hungarian Americans, what was the effect of World War II on the Birmingham neighborhood and the church?

M: Well, I came at the very end of the war. The real effect was that the boys came back from war, and we had many, many youngsters. And we have a beautiful memorial for those who were killed in the war. First of all, I think they earned the respect. They always had second thoughts. "We are second class citizens" and after they fought the war and they did very well, they became real 100% Americans. They really believed we don't have to take a second place and we are just as American as anybody else. And then they gave them the self respect that you don't have to deny what we are. It's very sad when somebody denies his 'bag' where he comes from. And so they became real Americans of Hungarian descent. And they were very proud, for instance, they were in a European theatre and they could talk to other people and they have seen the value if they were bilingual.

I: In June 1947, Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty visited St. Stephen's Church.

O: Right.

I: Do you remember that Mr. Kinsey?

O: I remember that because I was the official person to drive him around town and felt honored to have Cardinal Mindszenty sitting in my car. And there is something I haven't forgotten—he's as humble and noble as man can be. When I talked to him, he made me feel like I was "The Man" and not him, that he was my humble servant. A great man; I have great admiration and respect for him ever since.

I: Can you describe for us, can you remember what kind of celebration or gathering occurred in Birmingham?

O: We took him to the yacht club and had a special dinner for him and a celebration out at St. Stephen's Hall and a special Mass and he blessed and shook hands with everybody. Very gracious man. I think for the rest of my life I'll never forget the fine man he was. He made an impression on me very much. Very much impressed.

I: Did pretty much the whole of the Birmingham neighborhood come out...

O: Everybody, non-Catholics, Catholics. Everybody was at St. Stephen's Church to hear Cardinal Mindszenty speak.

I: Father Hernady, can you tell us what you remember most vividly about coming to Birmingham in 1954? When you arrived at St. Stephen's?

M: It was a great experience for me being a Hungarian, but I was in school in Rome for a couple of years and after that I served down South in North Carolina for five years. After seven years completely away from Hungarians it was just like a homecoming. First of all, the food became again Hungarian, what I never had for many, many years. And I was very happy to use my mother tongue to preach the word of God in Hungarian; and then the friendliness and warmth of people. I remember vividly when I left North Carolina and the Bishop said "You are ordained for service to your people." And that was the real reason that he gave me permission to come to Birmingham.

I: So you felt as though you had arrived with your people in Birmingham?

O: I might say also, when he arrived I remember he was accepted with open hearts, and that Father, I hope you don't mind my saying, through his efforts St. Stephen's is where it is today because he did a lot for the church and is still doing it.

I: Very nice compliment for Father. How did the people of Birmingham react to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956? Perhaps Mr. Ujvagi can speak to that.

P: Well, I think perhaps Oscar or Father might want to speak first. I obviously came after the Revolution. I came in June, six months after the Revolution ended in Hungary.

I: Okay.

O: I had great bitterness. I was very perturbed of hope that they would do this to the Hungarian people. And knowing that my mother and dad had relatives in Hungary - what are they doing to the Hungarian people? And as a consequence I dedicated myself to the St. Vincent DePaul Society to bring these people, when they came from Hungary, to bring them up and find a place for the family to eat and take them out to dinner and everything because it was just disturbing to us. I'm Hungarian, I'll always be Hungarian and I'm proud to be Hungarian and of my heritage and I was very disturbed. But I don't know, I think if I get any Russian in my hand I don't know what I'd do. I'm afraid I'd kill him!

P: I arrived in Toledo in June 1957 and my first impression is... we had come to New York and had stayed in New York for several weeks and at that point my father said that we would go anywhere where there was a job where he would be able to find work in his occupation. There was a job in Toledo, Ohio. So my father said, "Fine." So four children and my mother and father were then put on a train and we arrived at Union Station and the first person we met in Union Station was Father Hernady. He picked us up at the station, as a matter of fact, with another member of the parish and we spent a week to week-and-a-half at the St. Vincent DePaul Society Building on Washington Street, which I will always remember as an experience; and then moved into the Birmingham neighborhood. I've lived in Birmingham ever since except for a year and half that I served in Washington, D.C. A large number of refugees lived in the neighborhood at the time. Many of them came and were really welcomed with opened arms by the neighborhood. And the church did a great deal, as did Calvin United, to help sponsor families to come and individuals in the parish to help sponsor families to come to Toledo, help find them jobs and help find them a home and begin the children on their education, etc. I attended St. Stephen's School from there on in and, of course, grew up in the neighborhood. At the same time, there is a real distinction. You know, you mentioned the first family (Hungarian) that came to Toledo came around the turn of the century. And they, the immigrants and their children, are the ones who really are the patriarchs of the community. Then there was a second cycle of in-migration, as it were, of people that were called the "DP's", displaced persons. And these folks who left Hungary sometime around the war and came to the United States and then to Toledo after the second World War—the displaced persons. Then the wave that came when I came, which was the refugees. And they came in 1957 and even yet today every now and then you have someone who comes back into the community. And there very much has been and still does continue to exist a sort of an order in the community between the patriarch families and their children and others who have come into the community in the years since.

I: St. Stephen's is definitely an ethnic parish. What are some of the particularly Hungarian Catholic traditions that are practiced in your church? Which are specifically Hungarian and which are specifically Catholic?

M: Well, we firmly believe that people have a prayer language besides the language that they speak. Sometimes they retain in their prayer life a particular language and we have our Hungarian liturgy, a Hungarian Mass every Sunday, and the old beautiful Hungarian church hymns are still used; and that's the most important and most beautiful part. You don't necessarily have to be a 100% Hungarian in your language, but that you retain from your childhood, and that's very dear to you and that's the reason people like to come back to sing. And you know, everybody was so excited when we finally got the vernacular liturgy. We did that before, even when there was a strict rule in the church that you had to sing Latin when you have a High Mass.

I: Before Vatican II, the Hungarian church used the vernacular?

M: We quietly used the Hungarian and nobody reported us to Rome, so we did it. Maybe that was my... I wouldn't say wisdom, because I was young and I couldn't have had too much wisdom, but people in some of the churches who did this, you know, took their Hungarian hymns out of the people's hands, they paid the big price. People did not come back to their church because that's what they said, "If I can't have this special in my Hungarian church, I can go in an Irish church." Which was right.

P: I very firmly believe that, to me as an individual, my ethnic identity as a Hungarian American, I am a Hungarian American, and my identity as a Catholic are very much interwoven; and for me my culture, my traditions, my language, and my faith are very much together and the preservation of that culture enhances my role in the church and in so many places. As Father says, when that culture began to die, people turned from the ethnic church and from the traditions in that ethnic church because they didn't see the distinctions anymore. And so it's very, very important that we express ourselves with, not just with language, but with celebration-the Corpus Christi procession that occurs in the community, although that is not necessarily uniquely Hungarian. I think it's European tradition, an Eastern European tradition. I think we are probably the only church in the diocese that has a Corpus Christi procession.

I: Can you describe that procession for us?

M: Well, Oscar, you have been involved in the procession for many, many years.

O: Corpus Christi is the Blessed Sacrament, where each individual (about four people) puts up an altar; the Blessed Sacrament is exposed at this altar. I am deeply honored because the first stop is my funeral home; just inside the door the Blessed Sacrament is exposed. And I think that is quite an honor to be in the home and having the Blessed Sacrament exposed in your own private home.

I: And so the procession goes throughout...

O: And the procession continues all through Genesee Street to the three others (altars) outside. But mine is inside. It is across the street from the church and the women make up special hand-made table cloths for the altar and Mrs. Karcsek also has been for forty years and she had made this hand-made linen for the altar and when she died her daughter said, "Mother would like for you to have it." The very first time we used it was for Corpus Christi procession. It was the Blessed Sacrament exposed, and back in the room she was laid in the casket. I thought that was kind of unusual. It's an honor; it's a privilege to have that done.

I: Do you still have this procession?

O: Yes, I would invite you on Corpus Christi to come out and see how beautiful it is.

I: And Corpus Christi is in August?

O: All the societies from the churches march behind Father with the banners, the women, the choir, every body. It's really a beautiful sight. I'm proud of it.

P: That's very interesting. I remember as a young boy in Hungary, that's where I had my first Communion, I was in the Corpus Christi procession at my parish in Budapest and at that time it was partly a show of defiance as well, because it was made into a very big procession. It was a religious event back in 1954-1955. The first summer we came to Toledo, and lo and behold, the same procession, religious procession, was also being held here, so it made me feel obviously very much at home because the same traditions that we had were practiced back in Birmingham.

O: All the grade school children have baskets of flowers, petals, and we watch them drop the flowers, a rose petal on the street. It's beautiful. I would really like to have you come out and see that.

I: I certainly will make an effort to get there. What about some of the other religious celebrations and holidays?

M: The real Hungarian traditional religious event is the Christmas mystery play. They call it the Bethlehemeses.

That goes back to medieval times and it reflects on that part of Hungary where people came from. I think Dr. Pentzell could give you a very good explanation and that's his report. It's a medieval history drama. It was usually held in churches on various occasions.

I: All Christian churches?

M: Yes: My favorite place was Salzburg, where they played the "Jederman," "Every Man." Evidently winter-time you couldn't do it outside of church so it was inside of church. It's a play just like the "biblia pauperum," the poor man's bible pictures, so they lived and played the story of the birth of Christ.

P: The uniqueness in Birmingham...as Father mentions, the middle ages tradition, it was a vehicle to teach religion in the tenents of faith so the people saw it... Uniqueness of what happens here in Toledo is that from what the research we have had done by a professor at Ohio Northern University, the play is no longer even performed where it came from, which is Abauj (county) in Hungary. And he recently went back and tried to find records of the play and it is no longer performed there and it really has been a tradition that has been passed on from father to son. It is an oral tradition. While the words that the various players speak during the play have been written down, the music never has; and again the words to the songs have, but it has never been written and that music has just come down from generation to generation. There have been a few modern additions over the last decade, obviously, but it is an oral tradition that has lasted over 80-90 years (here in Toledo). I believe that in all that time it was perhaps not performed for a year or two; but beyond, every year, it has been performed. It is a major part of our identity as an Hungarian Catholic Church.

I: It's still being performed?

M: A few years ago we received a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and we made a nice movie out of it. So we saved a little piece of the Hungarian culture in Birmingham.

P: And at Easter time of course is the blessing of the Easter baskets, which again is not necessarily as much Hungarian tradition as it is Eastern European; and again for a long time we, I think, we did a lot of that at St. Stephen's. Now I am beginning to see that in suburban parishes beginning to pick up a little where there are some ethnics and ethnic identity has begun to emerge again. And it was just again this Easter, it was the most fantastic thing, I took my children along for the basket blessing and people will be coming back, people my generation now who are perhaps spread throughout Northwestern Ohio, but they come back for the tradition. It's like a homecoming.

I: They come back to St. Stephen's?

M: Yes and it's like a homecoming. They exchange hugs and they show their baskets and the colored eggs and talk and it's the most beautiful, beautiful thing to occur.

O: My father-in-law and mother-in-law went over to have their food blessed but my father-in-law always took a bottle of wine and have it blessed and always stopped at my home and before he went home he poured out a glass of wine that was blessed and we had to drink it.

I: Now that was Holy Saturday?

O: Holy Saturday. Everytime. Whether I wanted the wine or not I had to drink it.

P: We celebrate, for instance, I still do celebrate Easter on Holy Saturday, not on Easter Sunday morning, but late evening of Holy Saturday. It's just like with Christmas. Before when earlier in the late 1960's the whole ethnic movement began to emerge, one of the ways you could always check somebody when you asked them a question about traditions, they might not even know it, you asked them a question of, when do you celebrate Christmas? Those folks who celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve are still very much preserving a tradition because most Europeans celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve, not on Christmas morning when Santa Claus came down the chimney, but Christmas Eve with the Christ Child; and they may not even known why, you ask them why, say, "Well my parents did it and my grandparents did it." Well, that's tradition, but you may not know why, you preserve it, you maintain it and you perpetuate it.

O: One of traditions of blessing of food now, I know, we take the food and have it blessed. We have Hungarian Kolbasz, Hungarian nut-roll, Hungarian sweet-bread, Hungarian cheese that my wife makes, eggs, ham. And the kids all come over in the evening and we all sit down, have blessed food for supper.

P: Just very quickly, one Easter I did not spend in the neighborhood. I was living in Washington, D.C. and I could not find a church where we could take the basket to be blessed. We finally found an Ukrainian church and we went on Saturday afternoon to have our basket blessed and as the priest came down the aisle everybody opened their baskets. All of a sudden there were murmurs-murmurs, and everybody kept looking over to my basket. The reason is, we all used traditional tablecloths with traditional designs. Well, all the Ukrainian's had geometric designs on their tablecloths and ours had all the Hungarian flowers. They immediately spotted there were some newcomers to the church. Everybody just started looking and whispering around; they knew there was somebody else at the church.

I: They knew you from your embroidery?

P: Yes, that's right.

I: Along with the Easter season, before Easter, Palm Sunday, is there a Hungarian tradition for Palm Sunday, Father?

M: Well, it's very interesting. We do not call it Palm Sunday. We call it Flower Sunday. The reason for this is that Hungary has no palms. So when we have the traditional celebration of the entrance of Jesus to Jerusalem and they have palms, we just couldn't produce palms in Hungary so they had flowers. Especially in early Spring they had the pussy-willows and that was the traditional flower which the priest blessed and used in the procession. So we still call it Flower Sunday, Virágvasárnap. That would be particularly Hungarian.

I: Very much so. Are there any other specifically Hungarian celebrations held at St. Stephen's in other seasons?

M: Early in the summertime we celebrate the Feast of St. Stephen. He is our patron saint and he is a patron saint in Hungary and that always falls on August 20. Of course we cannot do it (always on Aug. 20) because we celebrate it on Sunday. This year, for instance, we are going to celebrate on the 19th of August. Again people from distance come back because that is a Hungarian national feast.

I: Do you do anything special?

M: No, we just celebrate St. Stephen.

I: You eat a lot of good Hungarian food?

M: Of course.

O: Right.

P: During the last 10 years that date has coincided with the Birmingham ethnic festival and, as you mentioned before, that is one of the things where all the churches have worked very strongly together. The festival will be 10 years old in 1984. The first Birmingham festival in 1974 was to celebrate the victory in the neighborhood of stopping an overpass and expansion of Consaul Street which would result in the destruction of the neighborhood and dividing the neighborhood in two. And we decided, Father decided, that we should do some celebrating, some dancing in the street. So the first festival was then organized and it was organized to coincide with the same day as the St. Stephen's annual picnics which used to be held at St. Stephen's. That had been part of the celebration of St. Stephen's day at the church. Now, of course, we are into our 10th year of celebration and all of the churches in the neighborhood work together along with some fraternal groups and ethnic organizations in the Birmingham neighborhood to make the festival a big success.

I: Are there any Hungarian customs associated with the birth of a child or early childhood?

M: Well, we always have celebrations, you know, we don't have to look for different occasions, but whenever we have a baptism that is a big, big celebration. The family is still important. Our people are family oriented. Whenever there is a baptism you think you are going to a wedding. Sometimes we have them so big that we are holding them in the church hall instead of home because they invite so many people over, all their relations.

I: It's a big reception type celebration?

O: Yes, my grandson was baptized and we had the hall and all the celebrants came down.

P: People couldn't fit into the house.

O: We still had to use the hall because everybody came down.

P: We see, Baptism and Holy Communion, it is not a private affair. It is very much a family affair. Then again you have a very large celebration, friends, neighbors, relatives, everybody come together for the major celebration for First Communion.

O: And even Confirmation - even when you are confirmed you still have a celebration. Everything's taken with great pride and joy that your daughter or son is confirmed and joyfulness to celebrate the Confirmation of a child and you have a feast galore. You name it, they have it.

I: Is the liturgy, or are the liturgies, pertaining to these baptisms and Confirmations and First Communions, are they in Hungarian?

M: No. That's why I say you can use different languages but you still have your Hungarian culture, Hungarian mentality, and Hungarian prayer language. No. We have one Hungarian liturgy on Sunday.

I: There are no special aspects of these celebrations?

M: The liturgy of the baptism is just like any other church. Perhaps we have, we have more people.

I: What about funerals? I've seen old funeral photographs.

O: In what respect now?

I: That the family would send a photograph back to their relatives in Hungary?

O: Yes, years ago it was not unusual. You would take the remains into church and after church you would come out of church and you would put the casket on a bier, open up the casket, all the mourning would gather around and take a picture of it, the body exposed and everything. And this picture they would send to Hungary.

I: And when was that?

O: This was back in 1920,'22,'23,'24. About 1926 . it started to die out. But in those days nobody used the funeral home. It was all at the home.

I: Do you know what the significance of sending that photograph back to Hungary was?

O: Well, they wanted to show that Uncle John or Grandma, or whatever relation, suppose they came from Hungary, they wanted to have a picture of it. Matter-of-factly I didn't approve of it. As a matter-of-fact if you want to see any of the pictures, I have about 20 of them.

M: When we have a funeral for somebody that belonged to one of the organizations, Rosary Society, or Holy Name, then the members really pay their respects to the deceased member. Rosary Society has a special liturgy, special prayer and then at the end when we take the body out of the church they have a special hymn which is very ancient, it's Hungarian, and then the Rosary is placed on the casket which is very unique.

O: They could be a total stranger in the neighborhood, Catholic, being buried from St. Stephen's church. The Altar and Rosary Society of St. Stephen's church will still come over the night before and pray the rosary even though they don't know the person but out of respect for the deceased, and a great respect. That's a Hungarian custom.

M: It is a nice custom among our people, speaking of the death. They go to Calvary Cemetery almost every Sunday, visiting the gravesites of those who died. So we have a traditional respect for the deceased.

O: And another thing that we do which, I believe, came from Hungary-- my dad has always done it since he was in the business but at the cemetery, as a final tribute, we give the family a rose placed upon the casket as a final farewell to their loved ones.

M: And after each funeral we go back again to the church hall and I would not say it's a celebration, but it's a nice family get-together, everybody's invited.

I: It sounds as though celebrations and traditions at St. Stephen's are very community oriented and quite large. What is the relationship between St. Stephen's Roman Catholic Church and St. Michael's Byzantine Catholic Church?

M: Well, the real common ground is that we came from the same place. They are Catholics like we are but their rite is the Oriental Rite, Byzantine Rite Catholics. They have a different Bishop who resides in Parma.

I: What about the relationship between St. Stephen's and Calvin United, the former Hungarian Reform Church?

M: Again the real relationship is that we have the common ancestry and common traditions. Hungary had the same religious picture that we have here, about 70% were Roman Catholics, about 17% were Protestants, Calvin or Lutheran, and then Greek Catholics and some Jewish people. We had a Hungarian-Jewish doctor in the neighborhood, actually we had two, one just deceased just a week or two ago. My people went to the funeral and after the funeral we came back to the church hall and we had a luncheon for the people. They didn't know how to do it and they didn't have any community behind them so we got together and we organized the luncheon for the people.

P: You know years, years ago the relationship among the people of course was very close. But officially, as it were, between the churches it wasn't so. Over the last twenty years probably, the churches have become much closer. In fact, when the neighborhood was clearly threatened in the early 1970's the churches organized together and were the major impetus for the formation of the Birmingham Coalition and I think there was a very strong feeling among all the churches that they had a very important role in preserving the community. Father, often when he makes speeches to other ethnic pastors, often talks about the fact that the role of the pastor in the church is one of involvement with the community and if the church is not involved in the community someday that pastor may wake up sitting in an empty rectory next to an empty church next to an empty school and everybody will be gone. So there has to be a very strong integrated relationship there. Over the last several years one of the churches, St. Michael's, has begun to make some moves out of the community, which saddens many of us.

I: How do you think that, if that should come about, how do you think that will affect St. Stephen's Church?

M: Would you repeat the question?

I: If St. Michael's Byzantine Church should move out of the Birmingham neighborhood, what effect do you see that causing in St. Stephen's congregation?

M: My idea, in my mind, they are not significant in numbers and what happened is that they deviated from the original Hungarian background because Byzantine Rite Catholics can be Hungarians, Slavics, all kinds of nationalities. Somehow they increased in numbers from the different languages and those people who are strangers don't understand the local customs, the importance of the local community. And that is the reason they did this and perhaps they wanted to out-reach to a territory and to try to increase in numbers. We firmly believe that our mission is in the neighborhood and we are openly welcome, everybody, to come to the neighborhood. We believe the community is not necessarily confined to the neighborhood; the St. Stephen's community is much, much larger-and even Birmingham community, anybody comes to the neighborhood to worship, to socialize, or for cultural needs, is a member of the Birmingham community and my idea again about being a strong community is a community which can absorb people. During the history of mankind it sometimes happens that the barbarians overtook the original nations. Well, I won't make an analogy, but almost I could say that the question is whether our local community, us, will be strong enough to absorb other people, or are we going to sell out ourselves? I think that at the present time we can really prove it that we are strong enough to absorb people and this is a factor in the case of so-called mixed marriages. If a Hungarian marries a non-Hungarian, which ethnic mentality is going to be stronger in the family? It happens when the father is Hungarian and the mother is Polish and if you ask the child, "Who are you?" And the child says, "I am Hungarian-American." It's very interesting and I know a lot of families. I have a priest friend, he comes from the same situation, the father was Polish and the mother was Hungarian and there the mother's ethnicity was stronger--absorbed the other way.

I: In closing, what do you see as the future of ethnic churches in general and St. Stephen's in particular?

O: Well, I think the ethnic churches are very important to any community. As a matter of fact, I think because of St. Stephen's Church, Birmingham is what it is today.

P: I think the future of ethnic churches and the life of the Catholic community in this country will continue to be a very strong one. There has been a strong resurgence and I think you are going to find, because of the fact that the ethnic church provides a unique blend of culture and traditions and faith, that there will continue to be people both who are physically near the churches as well disbursed throughout the community, as Father mentioned, that will continue to seek out those opportunities to worship. The role of ethnic churches will continue to be very important.

M: In my idea, the ethnic church is a very important vehicle to maintain and to proclaim the faith.

O: All churches, Calvin United, are just as important. They bring the people together also, as well as St. Stephen's. There is a closeness.

I: Thank you gentlemen very much for sharing your thoughts and your memories. It's been a very enjoyable time.

CALVIN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

\*Rev. Imre Bertalan

\*Ella Sendi

\*Louis Sendi

The transcript which follows is an interview conducted by Carol Ann DuBrul on June 11, 1984.

I When were you born and where were you born?

E March 4, 1906. At 2141 Bakewell Street.

I Where were your parents born?

E They came from Hungary, both of them.

I And when did they come?

E I don't know, it must have been Eighteen something. Right?

I Mr. Sendi, would you introduce yourself and tell us when you were born and where you were born?

L My name is Louis Sendi, I was born here in Toledo, on January 16, 1903. I'm a little bit older.

I How about your parents?

L My parents were both born in the Old Country in Hungary. Both came out in about 1892 or something like that.

I Reverend?

R My name is Imre Bertalan. I was born on October 4, 1949 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in a Hungarian community there similar to the Birmingham community here. My mother was born in New Brunswick; her parents came from Hungary around the turn of the century. My father came from Hungary in 1947.

I And when did you arrive in Birmingham?

R I came to Birmingham as a community organizer in 1977. I became pastor of Calvin Church in 1979.

I When did the first Protestant Hungarians come to Birmingham? Were your parents among the first?

L All the Hungarians that came from the old country, whether they were Catholic or Protestant, just all settled in the same neighborhood.

I And why did they come to this country?

L Oh, I imagine to find out if they could better themselves than they would in the old country. They all were looking to better themselves.

I Mainly for jobs?

L Yes.

I People refer to your church as the Reform Church. Can you tell us about that?

R Our church had its origins in a strong connection with the Reform Church in Hungary. It dates back to the time of the Reformation, with John Calvin being the foremost reformer in Hungary. Our church was originally pastored by Hungarian ministers at the time of it's founding in 1903.

I And when did it change it's name to United Church of Christ-Calvin United?

E Well it was Hungarian ENR, also. Hungarian Evangelical Reform Church.

I So it had . . .

R At the end of the 1950's when the United Church of Christ was formed by the merger of the ENR and the Congregational Christian Churches, we changed our name to Calvin United Church of Christ.

I What are some of your earliest memories of your church in Birmingham? Childhood memories.

E We had to go to Sunday school every Sunday. We went to church. You had to come home and tell your father what the sermon was about to make sure you listened. And you met up with elderly folks and respected them very greatly --not like they do today. If you were good you got to go to the show or maybe got two cents for an ice cream cone on Sunday.

I Did you go to church as a child only on Sunday, or were there other days?

E We used to have Saturday schools that we used to go to and then we had, like, little sewing circles like where you learned crocheting and crafts. Well, mostly it was crocheting those days and embroidering.

I What about the Saturday school? What did they teach at those sessions?

E They had Bible readings, memories from the Bible. You know, you had to memorize. That's how much I remember.

I Were these conducted in Hungarian?

E Yes, oh yes, at that time.

R Did you ever attend either of the afternoon church services on Sundays?

E Not very often.

L No.

E Mostly in the morning.

L The afternoons were your own. You could go to the Palm Opera House, Ha Ha, or to the Gaiety, cause that was two of the shows in the neighborhood.

I So you would go to the church in the morning and to the show in the afternoon?

E You got to go if you went to church.

I What about the 1920's, the so-called roaring twenties? Did they roar in Birmingham? Did they affect your church group?

L Oh, I don't think so.

I Why do you say that, Mr. Senoi?

L Well, the Hungarian people are sort of steady; they don't get excited about anything. They take everything that comes along without getting excited. The war came along. You knew you had to go.

I What about The Depression of the Thirties?

L Well, they suffered.

E They suffered. We worked on food stamps. I used to work on the food stamp meat, sugar, gasoline rationing.

I Did your church do anything special during this time?

E I don't remember that, but I used to do it at the school. I went to Birmingham School and that's where we had to go and we did volunteer work. It was all volunteer work that we done.

I What about World War II? How did that affect the Birmingham neighborhood?

L Well, there was quite a number of young people, you know, age 21 of course, not too many from our church, but from the neighborhood. There was quite a few who was "called to the colors" you might say.

I But not too many from your congregation?

L Not too many. Our congregation is not that big.

I How big is it?

L I would say around 250-300 or something like that.

I Has it always been about that same number or have you seen changes? When you were a child was it a larger congregation?

L No, I don't think so. Steady. The old folks died out. The younger people took their places.

I What are your memories of the Hungarian Revolution of Nineteen-fifty-six?

E I don't know about that.

L Very little. It didn't affect us too much.

I Did you have people coming into Birmingham who were becoming members of your church who had to leave Hungary during the Revolution?

L It's possible, but I don't recall.

E Yes, wasn't that when they came in, and then the churches got together and they helped these young people that came in . . .

I What did they do?

E Placed them in homes.

R Remember when Eleanor Mesteller and the others used to go door-to-door and collect for them?

E Yes, and we helped them out in that manner and families would take them in and they got a start. And today they are living great! Better than we are.

I So, you put them up?

R I was on the other end of that. Camp Kilmer in New Jersey was one of the main points into which the Hungarian refugees came, and my grandmother was one of the people who did social work with them. I was a member of our church's Junior choir at that point, and we would come in on Sundays with choirs from other churches and conduct programs for them. And from Camp Kilmer they went on to other urban areas of the United States wherever they received sponsors or received work. Approximately 300-some came to Toledo during that year or two.

E They came through Cleveland didn't they at the time?

R Yes.

E I think that's where they had this central location and they come on to Toledo.

I Would you say that the majority of those 300 Hungarian refugees settled in Birmingham? Could they have settled?

E Not anymore, they moved out of the neighborhood. Most of them.

R They are a very ambitious, upwardly mobile group. And some have kept their ties with the church. The ratio roughly of Catholics and Protestants in Hungary, as here in Birmingham, is three to one; three Catholics to every Protestant and we found that to be true as the refugees came, too. But, we do have several families active in the church now who came to us during that time and stayed with the congregation.

I Is that same ratio in Birmingham as well? The Hungarians in Birmingham. Would you say that the same ratio of three Catholics to one Protestant Hungarian is about the same in Birmingham?

L Possibly, possible.

E Just about, I would say.

I Since yours is an ethnic church, what are some of the particularly Hungarian traditions that you follow? Is the Hungarian language used in your church services?

E Uh huh. We have both services. We have Hungarian service and we have English services every Sunday. And sometimes we have combined services and we enjoy that very much. And traditions, Easter time and Holy Week.

I What about other, you mentioned Easter, and Easter traditions; what about some religious holidays and particular traditions in your church; are there other special things you do at Easter time?

E Well, we used to have Confirmation at Easter time...Palm Sunday and then Easter time they had their First Communion, which now is changed; but that was a quite a thing for many a year.

I Were there some Hungarian traditions attached to that Christian tradition?

E Yes. Now where I come from I had to learn all my catechism all in Hungarian, recited in Hungarian, and until today I can go to church and have communion and I say my own prayer that I was taught.

I In Hungarian?

E Uh hum.

R Louie, what about the sprinkling you used to do, the day after Easter?

L The day after Easter is sort of a funny holiday, you might call it. It isn't funny, but everybody liked it. The boys would go and call on the girls and some of them had little cans of water, perfumed water, and sprinkled the girls. And some of them they didn't like, they give them a bucket full.

E Then they would have to recite a verse. You know, they'd recite a verse, "I heard that there's a flower at this house and it's withering away and we come to sprinkle it to freshen it up". And if you liked the boys then they would get a special treat. Well, it was a big day for some of the boys.

I And what about the day after? I heard something . . .

E That was when the girls would go look for the boys and do the same thing. But the boys would always hide. You couldn't find them. They'd slip away.

I How is the ethnic church, such as Calvin United, different from an average American Protestant church? What about your music, your hymnals, your services in general?

E I think our hymnals are the same, aren't they?

R Our English ones are, but we have a special Hungarian hymnal.

I Oh, you have two sets of hymnals, one is American (English) and the other is Hungarian?

R One possible difference is the geographical area from which we draw our membership. Originally most of our members lived in Birmingham. As the neighborhood underwent changes and people dispersed throughout the city, they maintained their relationship with our church, their church, and we now have members as far south as Bowling Green, up into Michigan, far west as Swanton, and as far east as Oak Harbor. Very few American churches have that kind of a wide-spread appeal. We are the one Hungarian Reform Church here in Toledo.

I Does Calvin Church ever combine with the other ethnic churches in Birmingham for special events?

E Yes, we have, haven't we?

I What are some of those?

E Well, like our church was invited over to St. Stephens to take part in their services, which years ago, you wouldn't hear of it and now they acknowledge it where you can sit down in the front row and be with them as one.

L That depends on the priest there too. . .

E The priest has a lot to do with it.

I So now you get together for religious events. Do you ever get together for Hungarian social events that have no religious . . .?

L Oh, yes. Any time that they throw a party or something like that, or dinner or supper or something like a dance or any get-together, almost everyone goes. They respect you whether you are Catholic, Reformed or whatever they are.

I Do you have those events on a regular basis in Birmingham? Do you have the Hungarian events?

L Oh yes. Like I say, it's usually on special occasions, special holidays, or something like that. Why, you want to go, you go.

R We had a picnic yesterday, and the Catholics were well represented there.

I What's a Hungarian picnic? What makes the picnic Hungarian?

E The food and the music, because you have the ethnic food, you have the kolbasz, you have stuffed cabbage, you have chicken paprikas, you know, that's the dumplings with the sour cream gravy.

L She knows.

E And, there's the hot dogs, and pastry, and all the goodies, and the Hungarian band, and believe you me, some of the old-timers still live it up when the music goes on. You have a good time.

L It's a lot of fun.

E It's a lot of fun and it seems people come from all over for that.

I You mentioned the kolbasz. Isn't it true that there is a group of people in your church that makes, oh, there are two of you here! Maybe you can tell us a little bit about that. How long has that been going on? What does it involve? How many people? Ingredients?

E Well, I think it started out as a small group, and at one time it was just me alone. And, then, finally, it got a little bigger, and then finally, it got where it got to the Senior Citizen group which took it over. And it involves a lot because you have one day where crush your garlic, clean your garlic. You got to clean your casing, and you got to cut your casing to different lengths to account for your poundage.

I How much do you make? Do you make it once a month?

E Once a month, we make it and there is . . .

L Not during the summer months though.

E Not during the summer months because it's too hot to work with pork, and we cut up our own meat. We grind our own meat, then we weigh the meat and we have a mixer that mixes a hundred pounds at a time.

I Who are your customers?

E All over. It goes on to India, Alaska, anywhere.

L Florida, and every place.

E Everyplace, it's surprising how it travels. You freeze it good and solid and it holds up, because they come back for more.

I So, you're well-known around Toledo.

E Well-known all over for our sausage.

I What changes have you seen over the years at Calvin Church? Ah, you were saying, Mr. Sendi, that you feel that the number of people has stayed pretty much the same. What about the age of the congregation?

L Well, let's see, the church was organized in 1903, but I don't think the church was built until about 1905. I remember when this was organized, I was born in 1903, I was baptized in a little church on Paine Avenue, right across the street from the library there.

E There was a little church there, a little house, a wood church.

L I was baptized in that little wood church, and eventually either that caught fire or something, yeah . . .

E No, they moved that.

L Oh, did they move that? I thought that it caught fire?

E No, no.

L Then we all went to our church now.

E Then, that little church was a little colored church, where they had Holy Rollers, and . . .

L For a while . . .

E And on Sundays we'd go there and sit on the grass, and oh, we'd enjoy the singing and the hallelujah's, ya know? And, go down the river bank where they would baptize them with their clothes on. That was quite an exciting thing to see.

I You said that you were baptized in the smaller wooden church and then the church that you are now in, the building that you are now in, was built in 1905?

L Well, it was supposed to be organized in 1903, but I don't think the building was started until 1905 or pretty close to being finished at that date. Either 1905 or 1908.

I Did you look in the corner stone of the building? Was that opened recently?

E Uh hum.

I What did you find in the corner stone of your church?

R We found three items of interest: one was a written history of events leading up to the official founding in 1903 of our congregation and the beginnings of the building of the church that year which was finally completed right, as Mr. Sendi mentioned, the end of 1904 beginning of 1905. In addition we found little cards with people's names on them and the letter told us that whoever had a name on a card, that person gave at least \$1.00 toward the building of the church.

E Donation.

R Donation. There are about 98 names in the corner stone. And then we found coins, some Hungarian, some American, dating back to about 1903, then when they were minted; about 21 coins. Of course, Hungary then was Austria-Hungary so it was Austrian-Hungarian currency and then American coins.

E Now the box is going to be put back in again.

I And what do you intend to put in that box? Have you talked about that as a congregation?

R There are so many ideas. We taped our Pentecost worship service yesterday. We are going to put a copy of that tape in.

I An oral tape?

R An oral video tape. We will have a copy of the festival coming up in August on that tape and we will put that in too.

E And you have one of our Reverend/Doctor Ujlaki; they had a memorial service for him. They are going to put that in.

R There are a lot of books that we are going to put in; some of the old coins from the original box to maintain that continuity.

I And when will this box be opened?

R This will be at least the 125th anniversary, which would be forty-five years from now, to maybe the 130-140th. We would like some of our people to still be living then so they have the memories, our children. So we don't want to wait too long, but we want to wait long enough where it's going to be a special occasion.

I What do you see as the future of ethnic churches in general and Calvin United, particularly?

L I don't think we will ever change.

I And why is that?

L Because we were brought up that way and we brought up our children the same way. You belong to your church, or our church, and you manage to come to the same church that your parents were.

I So you see that, in the future, ethnic churches will be a very strong part of the neighborhood.

L Oh yes, I think so.

E Even though, you take my kids now, they understand it, but they don't speak it. They say, "Mother why didn't you talk more Hungarian?" They didn't want to learn. Now that they are up in years, now they wonder why, but they didn't want to take the time.

I Do you have grandchildren?

E Yes, my grandchildren, yes, I teach them how to say at Eastertime, how to say "Boldog Husvet" (which means Happy Easter); at Christmas time "Boldog Karacsony" and they will look at each other to see if they are going to tell me the right thing, but they remember. It's cute.

I Reverend, how about you as a relative newcomer, what do you see as the future of ethnic churches?

R I think the future is good also. One of the challenges all ethnic churches have is to decide whether they are first ethnic or they are first Christian and a lot of change or a lack of change then is based on that perception. I think we strive to decide that we're first Christians and then Hungarians, and that has enabled us to bring about some changes over the years which have been healthy. For instance, we were one of the first churches to bring in the English language to supplement the Hungarian language in our worship. We brought it in Toledo in the 1940's. Many churches waited until the 1950's and some to the 1960's and by that time they lost two or three generations of offspring who could no longer speak Hungarian. So changes like this have been made over the years and most of the members enjoy the language. Some can no longer even understand it. Yet we maintain the ethnic identity.

E But they love to come to our church for the singing of it, the Hungarian hymns. Even if they can't sing it they just love to hear us sing.

I Do you see any change in the place of the church in Birmingham today as compared to its place when you were growing up? The importance of the church in your particular lifestyle, do you see that as being changed in any way?

L No, I don't think so. You have a good governing body, called the Constistitory Board; I've been in it since 1926 and we've gone through a lot of changes insofar as the number of men in there. Years ago they only had 12. Now we got about double that.

I Is it always men that make up this board?

L No, we have women, too.

I When did that change?

L About six-seven years ago.

I What was the reason for that change?

L Well, we thought that some of the women were a little bit smarter, sometimes. Let's put it that way.

R Well, you made a comment in the car on the way over about the importance of the church; how it used to be that everybody went and without question you were a member of one of the churches but you sense that it's not same anymore now.

E No. Years ago, you would, say, going to St. Stephen's Church . . . you were not allowed to go in! As a kid going to school you couldn't play with your Catholic friends during the school year because they had to confess to the priest over there and that was a sin to play with a Protestant kid, and that was heart-sickening to think that, like, in our block I was the only Protestant kid or my family. Oh, I was great in the summer time to play with; let September come (the first day of school), hey, they didn't know you! But now today you can walk in your Catholic churces and they accept you as their own, you know, no problems whatsoever.

I You never heard that kind of prejudice issued from your church?

E No. No. Our church . . . In fact last year at our festival couple of our Sisters--They came from Bloomfield, Ohio. In fact, one of them was our neighbors and I never referred her as Sister so-and-so because I referred to her as a Mariska. Her name was Mary and her mother would call her Mariska, which is a real cute name in Hungarian and she said, "Don't ever call me Sister Celeste because I love the name Mariska the way you say it to me."--So she asked me if I would take her through my church with a friend she had with her and I looked at her and said, "You really want to?" And she said, "You know, of all the years that I lived in the neighborhood I never went through your church. I wasn't allowed." So she couldn't get over it to think that our church is so beautiful inside. And they even sat down in the front row and they said a prayer which was quite a surprise to me, you know?

I So if you had to say something about the changes that occurred over the years, would you say that they have been good changes?

E I think so. I think that it was for the better. Where today they like to mix-up with all the churches in the neighborhood.

L I would say that 50-70% of the people that we know in the neighborhood don't belong to our church. They belong to Holy Rosary, St. Stephen's, St. Michaels. But I know them all, or they all say "hello" to you.

E A real friendly neighborhood.

I It is a friendly neighborhood.

R Another constructive thing we've done in church is to pull together in the Birmingham Coalition, working together for the preservation and improvement of Birmingham. So we have both the religious relationships, social, and the political arena in which we work for the good of the neighborhood as a whole and there we stand united also.

I If you had to say one special thing, you have one memory of your church in Birmingham that stands in your memory, whether it was a special event or a special honor that you obtained, something special about you and your church, what would it be?

E That's hard to say.

L Boy, there are a lot of special occasions but I think one that most of the members of our church won't forget: I belong to Commandary out here in West Toledo and Mr. Nagy is President of the Congregation and he was Commander of Lafayette Lyttle Commandary at that particular time and one particular Sunday he invited all the members of Lafayette Lyttle Commandary to come over and participate in the service and they all came in with their black coats, chiffon hats, and it was a sight.

E They had a parade after church.

L All the people really liked it.

I Was that recent?

L Oh no, that's been fifteen or twenty years ago.

E They had a dinner, then after church they paraded in the neighborhood around the block. We served them a good meal.

I A good meal is always part of Hungarian hospitality, is it not? How about you Reverend, do you have one special memory of Calvin Church in Birmingham?

R My memory--in addition to being my first church at which I was ordained and installed, which will always have a special personal significance for me--what's been most exciting for me being there is the worship atmosphere, the worship climate, especially Easter's. This last Easter it was such a good day. The entire Holy Week experience was such a spiritual experience that we could have ridden the crest of that for weeks had there not been so much to do afterwards. It's the worship that I find really rewarding and that is what sticks in my mind as the most exciting part of church life.

I Mrs. Sendi, did you have a special memory pop into your mind?

E I am grateful to think that my kids are still coming to our church even though they moved away and a couple of them have joined other churches, but they still come back to ours for special occasions, and my grandchildren--I have 11 grandchildren, 2 great grandchildren--and they enjoy coming to Grandma's and going to church and of course I was baptized in Calvin United. I was confirmed and married there, and I hope to be buried there.

I Well, thank you very much, the three of you, for sharing your memories of Calvin Church and its influence in Birmingham. Thank you.

L Glad that we were of some help.

I Very much.









